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Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk
Phone: 01875 871330
www.the-soc.org.uk

Editors:

Co-ordinating editor
Ian Andrews

Peer-reviewed papers

Dr Stan da Prato

Assisted by:

Dr I. Bainbridge
Professor D. Jenkins
Dr M. Marquiss
Dr J.B. Nelson
R. Swann

Articles, news and views

Ian Francis
Jimmy Maxwell
Dr Stuart L. Rivers
Harry Scott

Editorial correspondence:

c/o SOC, Waterston House,
Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.
Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk

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Email: picades@ifb.co.uk

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Plate 156. An Orkney leg-flagged Purple Sandpiper on migration in Iceland, 16 May 2010 © Gunnar Þór Hallgrímsson.

Movements to Iceland and Svalbard by Purple Sandpipers wintering in Scotland

R.W. SUMMERS, C.J. CORSE, B. ETHERIDGE, J. HEATON,
R. RAE & R.L. SWANN

Over 1000 Purple Sandpipers were colour-ringed and leg-flagged in northern Scotland during winters 2004/05 to 2008/09, in an attempt to secure a first ringing record or sighting on the breeding grounds in Canada, where the bulk of the Scottish wintering population is thought to come from. Four birds were seen at different winter locations in subsequent years. An Orkney-ringed bird moved to Co. Mayo, Ireland, a bird ringed in North-east Scotland was seen in Co. Dublin, and Moray Firth-ringed birds moved to Aberdeen and Ayrshire. There were 15 overseas sightings. These included 10 sightings in May from south-west and north-east Iceland where Purple Sandpipers stage in spring prior to onward westward migration. A sighting on 12 April suggests that some birds migrate early to Iceland, or possibly change locations to over-winter in Iceland rather than return to Scotland. There was one autumn sighting on 19 September in north-east Iceland showing return migration through Iceland. Its appearance with the arrival of other Purple Sandpipers and its fresh plumage indicated that it had moulted elsewhere. There were three sightings in Svalbard. Earlier biometric studies had ruled this area out as a possible origin, but clearly some Svalbard birds do cross the North Sea to winter in north-east Scotland. We still await our first Canadian sighting.

Introduction

For most wader populations wintering in Britain, there is at least one ringing recovery from the breeding grounds, confirming its origin (Wernham *et al.* 2002). The Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* is an exception, because there have been no breeding season recoveries of birds from the long-billed population that winters in this country.

Studies of biometrics (specifically the bill length) showed that the frequency distributions of bill lengths of Purple Sandpipers in Britain are trimodal. The peak at around 25 mm represents males of a short-billed population, the peak at around 35 mm represents females of a long-billed population and the peak at 30 mm is a combination of short-billed females and long-billed males (Atkinson *et al.* 1981, Nicoll *et al.* 1988). The proportions of short-billed and long-billed birds vary around the coast of Britain. There is a high proportion of short-billed birds on the east coast between Angus and Yorkshire, whilst the long-billed birds predominate in northern Scotland (Nicoll *et al.* 1988). The long-billed birds are also more abundant, representing about three-quarters of the British population. Ringing recoveries and the matching of biometrics of wintering and breeding birds have shown that the short-billed birds originate from Norway (Atkinson *et al.* 1981, Rae *et al.* 1986). However, the breeding areas of the long-billed birds remain unknown, though it is known that they stage in Iceland in spring prior to onward migration. This is based on ringing recoveries (Boere *et al.* 1984, Corse & Summers 1999, Hallgrimsson *et al.* 2005) and the fact that Purple Sandpipers put on mass in Iceland for onward migration (Summers *et al.* 2009). Westward flights from south-west Iceland have also been observed in May. Canada is the likely destination. Greenland is unlikely because some of its population is resident (in south-west Greenland) and the biometrics do not match with the long-billed birds (Salomonsen 1967, Engelmoer & Roselaar 1998), whereas there is a good match with birds from Canada (Summers 1994).

The aim of our study was to obtain ringing recoveries or sightings on the migration route and on the suspected breeding grounds in Canada of birds ringed in winter in Scotland.

Methods

Purple Sandpipers were captured with cannon nets during winters 2004/05 to 2008/09 in four general areas of northern Scotland: Outer Hebrides, Orkney, Moray Firth and North-east Scotland (Figure 1). The catch sites in the Outer Hebrides were Balranald (North Uist), Rubha Aird a' Mhuile (South Uist) and Berneray; in Orkney, the Sands of Evie and Point of Ayre (Mainland), North Wick (Papa Westray) and Brough Ness and Hine Greenie (Sanday); in the Moray Firth, Brora, Balintore, Lossiemouth and Buckie; and in North-east Scotland, Peterhead and Aberdeen (Figure 1).

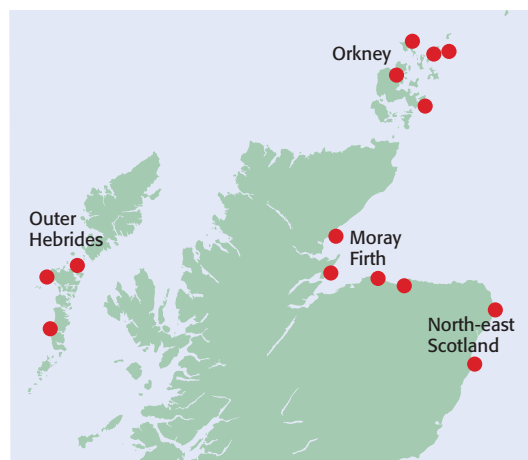


Figure 1. The locations where Purple Sandpipers were colour marked in Scotland during winter.



Figure 2. Movements of leg-flagged Purple Sandpipers from northern Scotland to Iceland and Svalbard.

To increase the likelihood of a ringed bird being subsequently seen, we also fitted the birds with colour rings and a yellow leg-flag, on which a symbol (red or black dot or cross) had been painted. In the first two years the flag was put on the tibia, but latterly on the tarsus where it was more visible. Each area had its own permutation of colour rings and unique symbol on the flag. The numbered metal ring was put on the tibia. The birds were caught largely in the winter months (November to March) though some catching also took place in April on the Outer Hebrides.

Ornithologists and field biologists in Iceland, Greenland and Canada were notified of our scheme and asked to look out for marked birds.

Results

During the five winters, 1095 Purple Sandpipers were colour-marked (Table 1). There were many sightings during winter at the locations where the Purple Sandpipers had been colour-marked. Only four were seen at distant locations in winter: an Orkney-marked bird was seen at Sruhill Lough, Achill Island, Co. Mayo, Ireland (54° 00'N, 9° 56' W) on 11 December 2009. A bird from North-east Scotland (ringed in either January or March 2006) was seen at Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, on 27 February 2010. One bird moved from Brora (ringed on 24 December 2007) in the Moray Firth to Aberdeen, where it was re-captured on 31 January 2010. Finally, a Moray Firth bird moved to Saltcoats, Ayrshire where it was seen on 31 January 2010.

There were 15 overseas sightings (Table 2, Figure 2, Plates 157 and 158). These included 11 from south-west and north-east Iceland in April and May. There was one sighting in autumn showing return migration through Iceland (Table 2).

There were three sightings in Svalbard, all from Purple Sandpipers marked in North-east Scotland (Table 2, Figure 2, Plate 158).

Table 1. Numbers of Purple Sandpipers colour-ringed and flagged in northern Scotland.

Winter	Outer Hebrides	Orkney	Moray Firth	North-east Scotland	Total
2004/05	0	22	30	0	52
2005/06	0	118	64	75	257
2006/07	157	0	79	0	236
2007/08	31	186	66	23	306
2008/09	54	131	59	0	244
Total	242	457	298	98	1095



Plate 157. An Orkney leg-flagged Purple Sandpiper on migration in Iceland, 9 May 2009 © Gunnar Þór Hallgrímsson.

Table 2. Details of overseas sightings of Purple Sandpipers leg-flagged in northern Scotland in winter (November–March). Some of the birds in the Outer Hebrides were also marked in April. The range of possible ringing dates is given.

	Date	Place
Ringed Sighted	Mar, Dec 2005; Feb 2006 25 May 2007	Orkney Sandgerdi, Iceland (64° 02'N, 22° 43'W)
Ringed Sighted	Apr 2007 22 May 2007	Outer Hebrides Kidafellsá, Kjós, Iceland (64° 18'N, 21° 47'W)
Ringed Sighted	Mar, Dec 2005; Feb 2006 4 May 2008	Orkney Sandgerdi, Iceland (2 birds)
Ringed Sighted	Apr 2007; Mar, Apr 2008 24 May 2008	Outer Hebrides Sandgerdi, Iceland
Ringed Sighted	Dec 2007, Jan 2008; Feb 2009 12 and 23 April 2009	Moray Firth Ásmundarstadir, Melrakkaslétta, Iceland (66° 30'N, 15° 57'W)
Ringed Sighted	Dec 2007 3 May 2009	North-east Scotland Hardbaksvík, Melrakkaslétta, Iceland (66° 31'N, 15° 60'W)
Ringed Sighted	Dec 2007; Feb, Mar 2009 3 and 10 May 2009	Orkney Ásmundarstadavík, Melrakkaslétta, Iceland (66° 30'N, 15° 57'W)
Ringed Sighted	Apr 2007; Mar, Apr 2008; Apr 2009 5, 7 and 10 May 2009	Outer Hebrides Sandgerdi, Iceland
Ringed Sighted	Mar, Dec 2005; Feb 2006 8 May 2009	Orkney Sandgerdi, Iceland
Ringed Sighted	Dec 2007; Feb, Mar 2009 9 and 18 May 2009	Orkney Gardskagi, Iceland (64° 05'N, 22° 42'W)
Ringed Sighted	Dec 2007; Feb, Mar 2009 19 September 2009	Orkney Ásmundarstadaeyja, Melrakkaslétta, Iceland (66° 29'N, 15° 54'W)
Ringed Sighted	Jan, Mar 2006 25 May 2007	North-east Scotland Adventdalen delta, Longyearbyen, Svalbard (78° 14'N, 15° 42'E)
Ringed Sighted	Jan, Mar 2006 1 Aug 2007	North-east Scotland Gravsjøen, Nordenskiöldkysten, Svalbard (77° 54'N, 13° 38'E)
Ringed Sighted	Jan, Mar 2006 25 May and 2 June 2008	North-east Scotland Adventdalen, Svalbard

Discussion

Purple Sandpipers tend to be site faithful to winter quarters (Atkinson *et al.* 1981). As a result, there were numerous re-sightings at the places where the birds were colour-marked. However, there was one December sighting from the west coast of Ireland of an Orkney-marked bird, and a bird ringed in North-east Scotland was seen on the east coast of Ireland in February. These birds may have changed their wintering areas, or they may be birds that winter in Ireland and had moved to Scotland in late winter in preparation for onward migration. The catching in Orkney and North-east Scotland extended into March, so it is possible that these birds were not local wintering birds. The other shifts between winter quarters were shorter distances: from the Moray Firth to Aberdeen and Ayrshire.

Our study failed to achieve its main objective of obtaining a ringing recovery or sighting in Canada. However, we added further records of birds staging in south-west Iceland in May, prior to onward westward migration (Summers *et al.* 2009). Prior to our study, all European ringing recoveries or sightings came from south-west Iceland in May, except for one Orkney-ringed bird

which was recovered on a boat north-west of Iceland, also in May (Boere *et al.* 1984, Corse & Summers 1999, Hallgrímsson *et al.* 2005). Proximity to Reykjavik where many bird watchers live will be part of the reason for this distribution of recoveries, though the west coast is perhaps also chosen by migrating waders as a staging place because it is closer to the breeding grounds. However, the three spring records from north-east Iceland show that migration through Iceland is on a broad front. Migrant Purple Sandpipers in Iceland are not obvious, unlike Red Knots *Calidris canutus* and Sanderlings *Calidris alba* whose numbers increase markedly in May (Gudmudsson & Gardarsson 1993). Rather, the local breeding Purple Sandpipers mask the presence of migrant Purple Sandpipers (Whitfield & Magnusson 1987).

The record on 12 April is particularly interesting because it suggests that some migrants arrive in Iceland before the migration in May when birds are accumulating migratory fuel, both in northern Scotland (Corse & Summers 1999) and Iceland (Summers *et al.* 2009). The distance from north Scotland to Iceland is 900 km, so it may be possible for Purple Sandpipers to accomplish the first part of their migration with only moderate fuel stores. Another possible interpretation for this April record is that some Purple Sandpipers do not complete the southward return migration to Scotland and over-winter in Iceland instead. Purple Sandpipers are well adapted to wintering at high latitudes (Summers *et al.* 1998), so switching wintering grounds is a possibility.

There were no sightings of the flagged birds in Greenland or Canada, the latter being the presumed origin of these birds (Atkinson *et al.* 1981, Nicoll *et al.* 1988). The chance of a small number of ornithologists in the vastness of the Canadian Arctic encountering a flagged bird is perhaps too slim. Realistically, there is more chance of a bird being seen on the Scottish wintering areas, having been marked in Canada. This approach worked well for determining the migration and wintering areas of the Norwegian and Icelandic breeding populations (Rae *et al.* 1986, Summers *et al.* 1988).

There was one autumn sighting in Iceland. The date (19 September) was at the end of the autumn moult period when the entire plumage is replaced (Morrison 1976). The average start and completion dates for Purple Sandpipers moulting primaries in Iceland are 22 July and 11 September, respectively (Summers *et al.* 2004). The observer noted that it had appeared to have completed wing moult and that it was in a flock of about 3000 Purple Sandpipers, many of which had arrived since 10 September (Plate 159, G.Ö. Benediktsson, in litt.). Therefore, it is possible that



Plate 158. A leg-flagged Purple Sandpiper from North-east Scotland at Adventdalen, Longyearbyen, Svalbard, 25 May 2008 © Edwin Winkel.



Plate 159. A flock of 1600 Purple Sandpipers at Hringalón, Melrakkaslétta, north-east Iceland, 8 November 2009. Four leg-flagged birds were seen in this region © Gudmundur Örn Benediktsson.

this bird had arrived recently, having moulted elsewhere, either within or outside Iceland, and would take on migratory fuel in Iceland before continuing its southward migration.

There were three sightings in Svalbard, confirming that some Svalbard Purple Sandpipers reach north-east Scotland. This was surprising, because, in our earlier studies, Svalbard had not been considered as a likely origin for wintering birds in Scotland (Nicoll *et al.* 1988). The mean bill measurements of Svalbard breeding Purple Sandpipers do not match with the means for wintering birds in Scotland. Figure 3 shows the frequency distribution of bill lengths from North-east Scotland, which provided the Svalbard records. However, North-east Scotland has provided the only other link with Svalbard. This was a recovery of a bird ringed at Peterhead and re-trapped as a breeding bird in Svalbard (Clark *et al.* 1996).

The other evidence that tended to rule out Svalbard was that there had been a lot of colour-ringing in Svalbard in the 1980s, showing that the bulk of Purple Sandpipers from Svalbard migrate down the Norwegian coast to winter in Norway and western Sweden (Hake *et al.* 1997). During this period, there were no records of Svalbard ringed birds in Scotland, despite active ringing programmes. We now know that some Svalbard birds do cross the North Sea to Scotland, though it seems that they are restricted to north-east Scotland and that only small numbers are involved.

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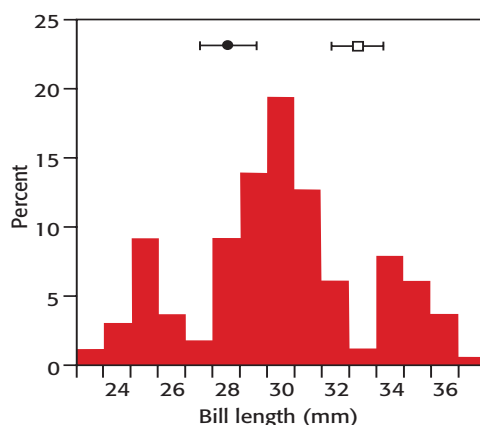


Figure 3. The frequency distribution of bill lengths of Purple Sandpipers wintering at Peterhead, North-east Scotland (from Nicoll *et al.* 1988). Sample size = 164. The mean bill lengths (\pm SDs) of breeding males (●) and females (□) from Svalbard (Nicoll *et al.* 1991) do not correspond with the peaks in the frequency distribution, suggesting that few Svalbard birds were present at Peterhead.

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Ron Summers, Lismore, Mill Crescent, North Kessock IV1 3XY

Colin Corse, Garrisdale, Lynn Park, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1SL

Brian Etheridge, Beechgrove, Rosehaugh East Drive, Avoch, Ross-shire IV9 8RE

Jacquie Heaton, Wester Cruenassie, Breakachy, Beauly, Inverness-shire IV4 7AE

Rab Rae, 11 Millend, Newburgh, Aberdeenshire AB41 6DX

Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR

Revised ms accepted March 2010



Plate 160. Common Raven, Marwick Head, Orkney, April 2005 © C.J. Booth.

The breeding population of Common Ravens on Mainland Orkney, 1983–2009

C.J. BOOTH

The breeding population of Common Ravens on Mainland Orkney was monitored from 1983 to 2009. The number of breeding pairs increased from 24 to 54 during the study period. Although sea cliffs were the commonest nesting locations, the percentage of pairs breeding at inland sites rose from 25% to 40%. These included quarries, buildings and other man-made sites, trees, an inland rock face and the steep bank of a burn. The mean annual breeding success of 60.7% is the lowest for any part of Britain apart from Shetland. The mean number of young reared per successful pair of 2.9 is below the Scottish mean of 3.1. In recent years human interference has decreased. However other factors also affected breeding success. These include the possible take-over of nests by Fulmars and the entanglement of the legs of young birds in twine incorporated in the nest lining.

Introduction

This paper details the breeding of Common Ravens *Corvus corax* on Mainland Orkney during a 26-year period from 1983 to 2009. The year 2001 has been omitted as the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic restricted access during the breeding season.

Study area and methods

Mainland is the largest of the Orkney Islands with an area of 520 km² and a coastline 234 km of which 50 km (12%) consists of cliffs over 15 m high, 169 km (72%) of low rocky shore and 15 km (6%) of beaches (Mather *et al.* 1975). There are a number of large freshwater lochs, also several plantations and smaller groups of trees, and tracts of moorland rising to over 260 m. The low lying land is cultivated and is mainly used for the rearing of livestock (cattle and sheep).

Attempts were made each year to locate all breeding pairs of Ravens. The entire coastline with suitable cliffs, including those of 5 m and less, was walked. Wooded areas including isolated clumps of trees and the wooded gardens of uninhabited houses were visited. Ruined buildings, particularly those standing isolated in fields, were checked as well as quarries, both active and disused, communication pylons, inland crags and the steep banks of burns.

A nesting attempt was recorded if a lined nest or a nest with eggs or young was found. A nest was considered to have been successful either where the young were known to have fledged or if the young were seen within one week of fledging.

In order to try and ascertain the age of first breeding, 131 young were colour ringed over a six-year period, a different colour being used in each year. These PVC rings had two letters engraved on them, either in black or white, so each bird could be individually identified in the field. These young, as well as some young from other broods, were fitted with metal BTO rings.

Results

The number of pairs breeding annually and their success is shown in Figure 1. The annual breeding success varied during the study period, ranging from 44.8% to 74.1%, with a mean of 60.7%. The average number of young reared annually per successful nesting attempt ranged from 2.0 to 3.5, with a mean of 2.9. For all pairs nesting, the annual range was from 1.0 to 2.3, with a mean of 1.7.

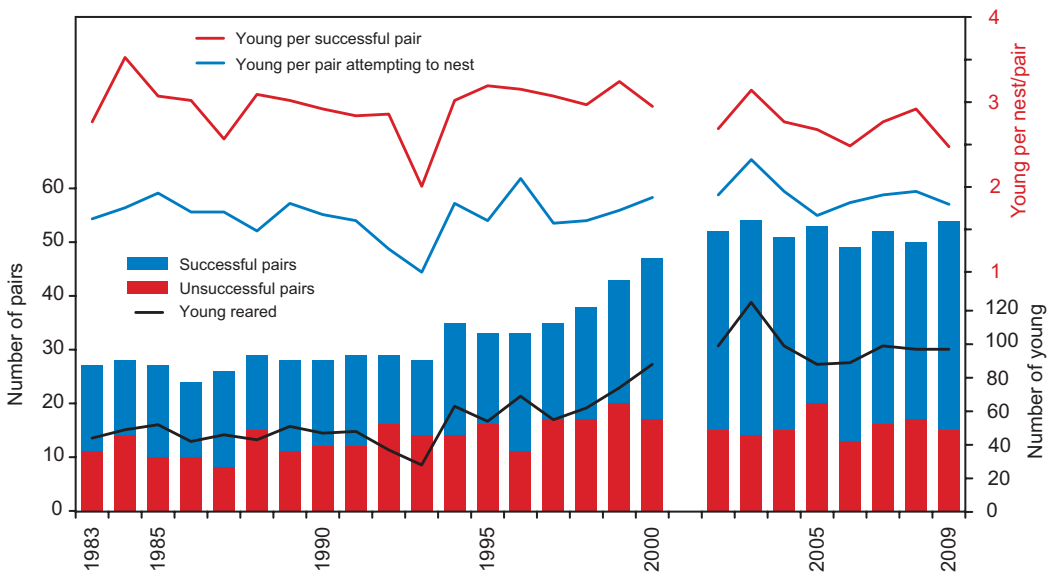


Figure 1. The numbers and breeding success of Common Ravens on Mainland Orkney, 1983–2009. Note: Foot and Mouth disease restricted access in 2001.

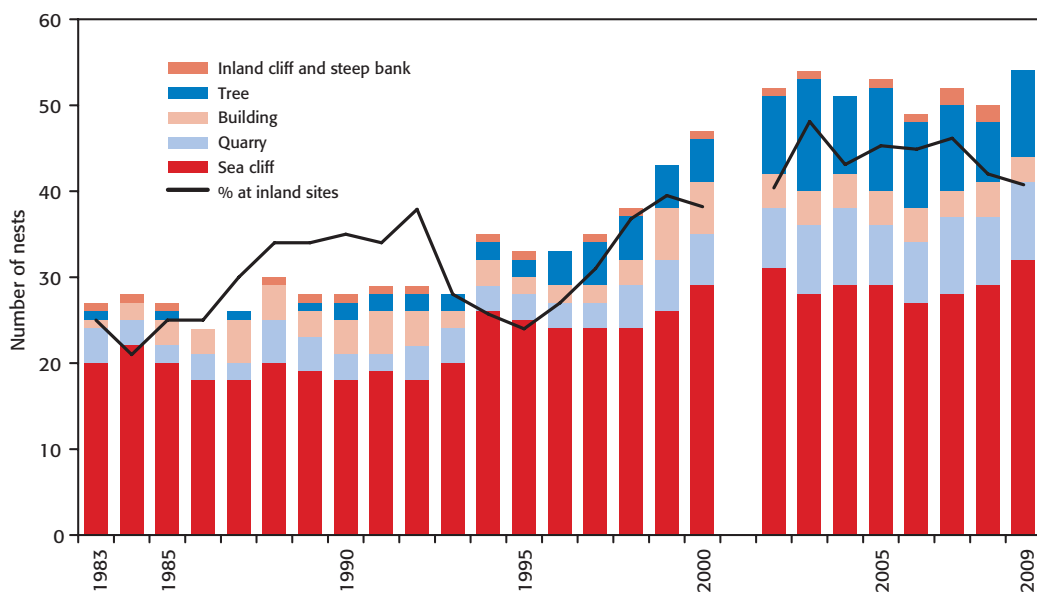


Figure 2. Location of Common Raven nests on Mainland Orkney, 1983–2009. Note: Foot and Mouth disease restricted access in 2001.

For many nests it was not possible to obtain data on completed clutch sizes either because of difficult access or limited time. For those where it was certain that the clutches were complete details are given in Table 1. The total number of clutches was 72 and the mean clutch size 5.0.

Table 1. The clutch sizes of Common Ravens on Mainland Orkney, 1983–2009.

Number of eggs in clutch	3	4	5	6	7
Number of clutches	7	14	26	24	1

For 60 clutches it was possible to establish the date of the laying of the first egg. This ranged from 25 February to 29 March, with a mean date of 10 March. The locations of nesting sites used were varied; sea cliffs were the most frequently used, but inland sites increased in number during the study period. The number of pairs using sea cliff and inland sites is shown in Figure 2.

Sea cliffs were the commonest nesting sites, ranging from 79% of all nest sites in 1984 to 51.9% in 2003 (Table 3). Of the sea cliff nesting territories occupied at least once during the study period, 37 (77%) were on cliffs above 15 m, five (10.5%) on cliffs between 5 m and 15 m and six (12.5%) on cliffs below 5 m.

The number of pairs nesting at the different types of inland site is shown in Figure 2. A total of 11 different quarries was used, of these five were in active use, three for quarrying stone and two for landfill and rubbish disposal. Two, which were partly flooded, have been taken over for water sport activity in the last two years and it remains to be seen how this will affect the nesting Ravens. Another is used for sheltering and feeding cattle. There were 14 different buildings occupied in at least one year ranging from the bell tower of a ruined church to a small disused barn. In addition a communications pylon has been occupied in two of the years. Since the study began five of the buildings have collapsed and are no longer suitable, another, a war time structure, has been demolished and one, a cottage, is being rebuilt. It seems likely that there will be fewer buildings available for Ravens to use as nest sites in the future. In one barn the provision of a platform on the roof beams enabled a pair to nest for several years until the whole roof collapsed (Booth 1998).



Plate 161. Full-grown young Common Ravens in a nest at a quarry site, St Ola, Orkney, April 2008 © C.J. Booth.

Twenty different tree sites were located, with the number increasing from one in 1983 to a maximum of 13 in 2003 (Booth 2004). The nests have been in isolated trees, small and large groups of planted trees, willow scrub and gardens of unoccupied houses. The heights from the ground ranged from 1.8 m to 9 m. As with buildings, some sites have been lost; three which were in gardens of unoccupied buildings are no longer used as the houses have recently been renovated.

One inland cliff site has been occupied throughout the period but success has been poor mainly due to human interference. The steep, heather covered, bank of a burn has been used on two occasions: another similar site was used in the 1970s.

Distances between territorial pairs

The majority of nests were at least 1 km apart but there were exceptions. The greatest density along a linear stretch of cliff in one particular year was five nests in 2.8 km; the following year there were four nests on the same stretch of cliff. Three pairs regularly nest here but there was an unusual number of dead sheep on the nearby moorland during this period. Apart from these the shortest distance recorded between two nests was 400 m, with between 500 and 850 m noted on six occasions. Mainland has an area of 520 km² and taking the maximum of 54 pairs breeding in one year this gives a density of one pair per 9.6 km².

Age of first breeding

From colour ringing it was established that three different birds first attempted to breed when five years old (Booth 2002). During the 1970s a few young were wing tagged and one of these was recorded breeding for the first time when six years old (Booth 1986). The oldest of the colour ringed birds was 13 in 2008; at this time the colour ring appeared to be very worn.

Movements

Most movements of birds ringed as nestlings were within the islands with recoveries during the study period of from five to 26 km from the ringing site. The only longer movement was of 109 km, the bird having crossed the Pentland Firth to the Scottish mainland.

Discussion

There have been several changes in the breeding population during the 26 years. The numbers of breeding pairs have doubled and there has been an obvious increase in the proportion of those that are breeding at inland sites. One factor that has probably helped is the decrease in the amount of human interference, such as destruction of nests, dropping stones on to the nest contents or shooting of young in the nest. Unfortunately every year one or two nesting failures can still be put down to these causes. Most nesting Ravens are intolerant of human presence and become very noisy if the nest site is approached which draws attention to the nest. Often they will show displacement activity, pulling at vegetation and chasing passing birds such as gulls and Fulmars. At some popular coastal tourist destinations the Ravens appear to have adapted their behaviour and often remain very quiet, the female staying on the nest and the male watching from a nearby vantage point.

In March and April Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* are prospecting sea cliffs and quarries for nesting sites. Each year Raven nests that have contained eggs or small young are later found occupied by Fulmars but it is not known whether the Fulmars have actually ousted the Ravens from their nests. The Ravens may have already deserted or possibly vacated the nest for a length of time, perhaps due to the prolonged presence of humans in the vicinity. This would allow a Fulmar to land on the nest and break eggs or kill small young. A further threat is that of Fulmar oiling, especially to newly fledged Ravens and instances of oiling are seen in most years.

On at least one occasion a Raven deserted when a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* has occupied a ledge close to the nest. There are only about six pairs of Peregrines attempting to nest on Mainland each year so their effect is minimal.

One other problem is the entanglement of legs and feet in binder twine or similar cord that has been incorporated in the nest lining. One or two cases are noted nearly every year (Booth 2001).

Despite the increase in the number of breeding pairs the mean breeding success of Ravens on Mainland, Orkney of just 60% is the lowest for any part of Britain and Ireland apart from Shetland (Ratcliffe 1997). The figure of 2.9 young reared per successful pair is below the mean of 3.1 per pair for Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This comparison may understate the difference since that for Scotland includes broods of all ages (Ratcliffe 1997) whereas the Orkney figure is for young already fledged or within a week of fledging.



Plate 162. Young Common Raven with a leg entangled in twine from the nest lining, West Mainland, Orkney, May 2007 © C.J. Booth.



Plate 163. Common Raven nest in the roof of a ruined cottage, Sandwick, Orkney, May 2008 © C.J. Booth.

The mean laying date for the first egg of 10 March is slightly later than the mean of 6–7 March given by Ratcliffe for Britain and Ireland as a whole but the mean clutch size of 5.0 is higher than the mean of 4.8 for Britain (Ratcliffe 1997).

Inland nesting on Mainland has been limited by the availability of suitable nesting sites. However the maturing of small plantations that were established in the 1970s has now provided additional nest sites. The number of pairs using tree sites increased from just one in 1983 to between ten and 13 towards the end of the study period. Further monitoring will be required to see if the breeding population increases any further.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people who have over the years provided me with information on nesting Ravens. I am very grateful to Bob Adam and Steven Beaven for their help with field work and Jean Booth for assistance in the preparation of this paper. My thanks are also due to Tim Dean for his comments on an earlier draft and to Stan da Prato and Ian Andrews for improvements to the text.

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C.J. Booth, Ronas, 34 High Street, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1AZ

Revised ms accepted March 2010



Plate 164. Nominate-race Black-tailed Godwit, Heylipol, Isle of Tiree, 6 May 2009 © John Bowler

A nominate-race Black-tailed Godwit on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll, 6–7 May 2009 - the first Scottish record

J.M. BOWLER

At around 08.00 hrs on 6 May 2009, I checked Loch an Eilein on Tiree for passage waders and found seven Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* which I scoped for leg-flags. Tiree hosts large flocks of Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits *L. l. islandica* on both spring and autumn passage, and since 2001, I have read some 30 different colour-ring combinations on these birds including individuals bearing blue, green and red leg-flags originating from sites in Iceland, England, France and Portugal.

There were four adult birds in full summer plumage plus three less well marked first-summer birds. None of them had the familiar bright colour rings or leg-flags, however, one of the first-summer birds carried a rather inconspicuous narrow yellowish leg-flag on its left tibia and a metal ring on its right tibia. I attempted to read the inscription, but this proved difficult. The flock moved to a large improved silage field at Heylipol, where although the bird was very close (less than 10 m), the leg-flag still proved difficult to read in the poor light; it appeared to be '560028' or '56028'.

Rapid e-mail correspondence revealed that the bird had not been ringed as part of the Icelandic breeding population study and had instead been ringed as a chick in the Netherlands (although my reading of the number was wrong) where breeding birds belong to the nominate continental race (Dr Jenny Gill, Jos Hooijmeijer in litt.).

Having discovered that this would be the first record of this race for Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007), I hurried back to Heylipol to observe the bird further, compare its structure and plumage to the neighbouring birds and take more digiscoped photographs of the bird together with the neighbouring godwits. The bird was clearly in its first-summer, with limited peachy-orange tones on the chest, face, upper mantle and nape, boldly whitish underparts barred blacker on the flanks and a rather thick-based bill. Its bill was similar in length to an adjacent large female bird, although the bill was noticeably straighter, whilst its overall size and plumage later indicated that it was a male. A close examination of the leg-flag in better light revealed the code to be 'C28'. It seems the flag had somehow slipped open with the code shown once the right way round preceded by the same code in reverse coming through more faintly from the other side of the flag, with some overlap of the 'C's - hence the earlier reading of '56028'. With this information Jos Hooijmeijer could now confirm that 'C28' had been ringed as a chick on 19 May 2008 at Koudum, Haanmeer, south-western Friesland, The Netherlands (52° 55' 24"N, 5° 26' 6"E) and that this was its first sighting since being ringed.

The bird was observed at Loch an Eilein and then Heylipol the following morning, but on the 8th there was no sign of it or indeed any Black-tailed Godwits at either site, and it was assumed to have left the island - presumably on its way to Iceland with the flock it had attached to.

With the help of published literature and e-mail discussion, it was concluded that on the basis of size, structure, bill/leg proportion and plumage details, this bird was a typical first-summer male nominate race bird (R. Millington, J. Gill, P. Potts & M. Scott in litt., Roselaar & Gerritsen 1991). The remaining birds in the flock were a first-summer female *islandica*, four adult *islandicas* and an oddly-plumaged, presumably first-summer bird that was in all probability another *islandica* (that was not photographed well enough to identify it either way).

This is the first unequivocal record of Continental Black-tailed Godwit from Scotland. It has been accepted by the Scottish Birds Records Committee.



Plate 165–166. Nominate-race Black-tailed Godwit, (left frame: second bird from right) Heylipol, Isle of Tiree, 6 May 2009 © John Bowler

Description

A typically tall, long-legged and long-billed wader, with rather elegant proportions - obviously a Black-tailed Godwit from structural details as well as from key plumage characters including a bold white wing-bar, squarish white rump patch and black tail. In direct comparison with adjacent *islandica*-race birds, this bird showed the following features:

Structure

The bird was relatively large, being a little larger than adjacent male *islandica* and of similar size to an adjacent large female first-summer *islandica*. The body was rather longer and slimmer than on adjacent *islandica*. This was accentuated by longer wing-tips created by very long tertials. The bird sometimes showed a 'hump-backed' look, created where the top of the mantle met the base of the neck, when the bird was feeding. The neck could appear both a little longer and slimmer than on adjacent birds, more obviously so when outstretched. The bill was obviously long, particularly so compared to male *islandica*, and was relatively straight, lacking an obvious up-sweep along the whole of its length as shown by some of the *islandica*. The bill base was also rather deeper, whilst the face was more elongated as it narrowed toward the bill-base, making the eye appear further from the base of the bill than on the *islandica*, and the forehead more gently-sloping, giving the bird a subtly different head-shape overall. The legs were slightly longer than on adjacent birds. This was not always easy to see, but the tibia in particular looked longer at times than on nearby birds.

Plumage

The bird had an overall warmer and browner look than the adjacent silvery-greyish-toned first-summer *islandica*. There was a rich peachy-orange wash to the face, nape, breast and upper mantle, which was subtly richer and more complete than on the first-summer *islandica*. This also contrasted more strongly with the remaining greyer upperparts and whiter underparts. The head pattern was more clearly pronounced with a blacker fore-crown and stronger black line through the eye, plus a more obvious whitish supercilium and pale ring around the lower half of the eye. The upperparts including the upperwing were more heavily and more darkly marked, with a concentration of dark greyish marks on the scapulars and some thicker paler edges on some of the wing coverts. The flanks and breast were more boldly marked with blackish vertically-aligned bars, which were particularly marked on the otherwise rather cleanly white flanks. The bill was boldly two-toned, perhaps with a slightly richer, more orangey-pink basal half than on the *islandica*. The legs and eyes were black as on *islandica*.



Plate 167–168. Nominate-race Black-tailed Godwit (left frame: bird on right, right frame: middle bird), Loch an Eilein, Isle of Tiree, 7 May 2009 © John Bowler

Reference

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John Bowler, Pairc na Coille, Balephuill, Isle of Tiree, Argyll PA77 6UE

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There are three races of Black-tailed Godwit. *L.l. limosa*, the Continental or European Black-tailed Godwit, which breeds from western and central Europe to central Asia and Asiatic Russia, as far east as the Yenisei River. *L.l. islandica*, the Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit, which breeds mostly in Iceland, but also on the Faeroe Islands, Shetland and the Lofoten Islands. *L.l. melanuroides*, the Asian Black-tailed Godwit, which breeds in Mongolia, northern China, Siberia and far eastern Russia.

Until 1956, all Black-tailed Godwits in Scotland were ascribed to the nominate race (e.g. Baxter & Rintoul 1953), but within a few years of *islandica* birds being first recognised in the UK (BOU 1956, Vernon 1963) Thom (1986) considered all migrant, wintering and breeding birds in Scotland to be of that race. The few pairs recorded breeding in southern and western Scotland mainly in 1964–79 have been assumed to be of the nominate subspecies by some authors (e.g. Gibbons *et al.* 1993). However, there is no published evidence as to why this was the case, and the assumption may be purely based on habitat. There is no information on the race involved in these records in the RBBP files (M. Holling pers. comm.). These sporadic breeding attempts have also been linked to strong passage and above average wintering of Icelandic migrants (Forrester *et al.* 2007). A pair which probably bred in Dumfries & Galloway in 2005 was thought most likely to be *L. l. limosa* (Holling *et al.* 2008), but again there was no firm evidence (P.N. Collin pers. comm.). Nominate race pairs regularly nest as far north as Lancashire (Fylde Bird Club 2010). *Ed.*

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Alan Brown, Chair of SBRC, has commented as follows: “Distinguishing a first-summer bird of the nominate race *limosa* from the race *islandica* is far from easy and John Bowler is to be congratulated on his find. SBRC considered it prudent, for a first for Scotland of *limosa*, to check with Dutch ringers whether *islandica* or mixed pairs had ever bred in the Netherlands. Jos Hooijmeijer and Astrid Kant kindly replied that as far as they knew there were no proven breeding records of *islandica* or by mixed pairs in the Netherlands. Also, given that the timing of breeding by *limosa* in the Netherlands and *islandica* in Iceland is so different, they would be surprised if they ever encountered such a case. With this additional information, SBRC members unanimously confirmed acceptance of the Tiree bird.”



Plate 169. *White-winged Tern, adult, Loch of Tankerness, Mainland, Orkney, 8–10 & 27 August 2007*
© Keith Hague.

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2005–08. Part 2

T. AP RHEINALLT, C.J. MCINERNY, A.W. LAUDER & R.Y. MCGOWAN
on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

Continued from Scottish Birds 30: 99–123.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* 59: 8: 67

Table 19. Accepted records of White-winged Tern in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

2 birds: Angus & Dundee 1, Clyde 1.

2007

Angus & Dundee Loch of Kinnordy, adult, 29 May, photo (D. Gilbert, H. Morton, T. & J. Williams).

North-east Scotland Loch of Skene, juvenile/first-winter, 21–29 October, photo (H.A. Addelee *et al.*).

Orkney Loch of Tankerness & Mill Sand, Mainland, second-summer, 22–23 July, photo (K.E. Hague).

Orkney Loch of Tankerness, Mainland, adult, 8–10 & 27 August, found dead, photo (K.E. Hague *et al.*).

2008

Highland Inverness Airport, Inverness district, adult, 11–12 August (H. Loates, T. Patrick *et al.*); same Allanfean, Balloch, Inverness district, 21–22 August, photo (D.C. Jardine *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, adult, 11 August, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).

White-winged Tern is a rare visitor to Scotland, mostly observed along the east side of the country from late spring to late autumn.

It was removed from the list of species considered by BBRC in January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a). The number of individuals observed in Scotland to the end of 2004 was 59 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.*

2007, with an erroneous 2004 Orkney record removed), with a further two seen in 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a, 2007c). Another six were found during the period 2006–08, consisting of adults and a second-summer in spring and summer, and a juvenile/first-winter in late autumn. Two of the sightings during the period were on Orkney, an area responsible for many past records. Both birds were found by the same observer at the same site in the same year, but were of different ages.

(Breeds on marshy lakes in central and eastern Palearctic areas, migrating south to winter in Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Australasia.)

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* 286: 28: 314

Table 20. Accepted records of Greater Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2005–08. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 21.

2005

Sea area Forties *Buchan Alpha* oil platform, 57°54'N 00°01'E, 22 May, photo (B. Baker *et al.*).

2008

Argyll The Reef, Tiree, adult, 12–29 August, photo (J. Bowler, D. Orr-Ewing *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Bàgh a' Bhaile (Village Bay), St Kilda, 23 May (W.T.S. Miles).

Greater Short-toed Lark is found annually in Scotland in very small numbers, mostly in spring and autumn, but with almost all observations on Fair Isle, Shetland and Orkney. It is rare elsewhere, particularly on the mainland.

During the period 2005–08, in addition to the three occurrences in Table 20, 13 were found on Fair Isle, eight in Shetland, and four on North Ronaldsay (Orkney), where records of this species are judged by local committees. All were seen during the spring and autumn migration periods, from 22 April to 1 July and from 14 September to 24 October respectively.

Table 21. Accepted records of Greater Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2005–08.

Year	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2005				
Fair Isle	1	1	24 May	15–22 October
Orkney	-	2	-	25 Sep–14 Oct
Shetland	-	-	-	-
2006				
Fair Isle	4	3	6 May–17 Jun	23 Sep–14 Oct
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	1	3	10–18 May	30 Sep–24 Oct
2007				
Fair Isle	2	1	5–13 June	4–13 October
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	2	-	19 Sep–14 Oct
2008				
Fair Isle	1	-	22–24 April	-
Orkney	1	1	16 Jun–1 Jul	17 October
Shetland	-	2	-	14 Sep–15 Oct

Birds seen in Scotland are likely to be either spring overshoots or displaced autumn migrants from the Continent. Those seen on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) and the *Buchan Alpha* oil platform in the North Sea fit this pattern, being found in late May. However, the individual on Tiree (Argyll), present for 18 days from mid-August, may instead have been summering. The *Buchan Alpha* (Baker 2005) and Tiree individuals were both firsts for the respective recording areas.

(Eight or nine subspecies. Breeds widely in dry, sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to the Middle East and western China, with populations migrating to winter in India, the Middle East and Africa.)



Plate 170. Wood Lark, Peffer Sands, Scoughall, Lothian, 15–24 February 2008 © Mark Darling.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea* 68 (1950–2004): 6: 74

Table 22. Accepted records of Wood Lark in Scotland, 2005–08.

2006

Fair Isle Upper Stoneybrek, 5 November (P.A.A. Baxter).

Shetland Foula, 31 March to 13 April, photo (G. & D. Atherton).

2007

Shetland Noness, Mainland, 9–13 October, photo (P.M. Ellis *et al.*).

Shetland Out Skerries, 27 October to 3 December (P.R. Flint).

2008

Fair Isle Midway & Lower Stoneybrek, 6–18 November, photo (D.N. Shaw).

Lothian Peffer Sands, Scoughall, 15–24 February, photo (M. Holling *et al.*).

Wood Lark remains a rare bird in Scotland, almost exclusively found on Shetland and Fair Isle in late autumn and early winter, with a slight increase in records in recent years.

Before the 1930s it was seen regularly in Fair Isle, and small groups occasionally overwintered, but only 68 birds were found in Scotland between 1950 and 2004 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007). There were another six in Scotland during the period 2005–08, although it is possible that the two Shetland records in 2007 refer to the same individual. Autumn vagrants most likely originated from northern Continental populations, which are known to move large distances south to winter in Mediterranean areas. However, the source of the Foula (Shetland) and Peffer Sands (Lothian) individuals in February and March is less obvious. The population in England is currently undergoing a significant expansion in range and size, with birds returning to breeding territories from late February (Wotton & Gillings 2000). It is possible, therefore, that both these birds originated from England. Wood Larks have been

found attempting to establish breeding territories in Scotland on two occasions in recent times, although nesting was not proven (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The Peffer Sands individual was present in potential breeding habitat, which may account for it remaining for ten days.

(Two subspecies breed from the Middle East through eastern and southern Europe to England north to Yorkshire, where the population is increasing. Most populations move south to wintering areas, with more northerly populations moving the farthest.)

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* 40: 12: 52

Table 23. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

3 birds: North-east Scotland 1, Shetland 2.

2006

Angus & Dundee Red Castle, Lunan Bay, 12 November, photo (K. Edwards, G. Smith *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Old Rattray Farm, Strathbeg, 23 May (T. Marshall *et al.*).

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 6 May, photo (M.G. Pennington *et al.*).

Shetland Foula, 7–8 May, photo (G. & D. Atherton).

Shetland Hoswick, Mainland, adult, 28 August to 18 October, photo (P.M. Ellis *et al.*).

2007

North-east Scotland Collieston, 16 April (P.S. Crockett).

Outer Hebrides Port Nis (Port of Ness), Lewis, adult, 28 October, photo (T. ap Rheinallt *et al.*).

2008

Outer Hebrides Scolpaig, Rubha Ghriminis (Griminish Point), North Uist, 6 June (D. & M. Galloway).

Shetland Symbister, Whalsay, 5 June, photo (B. Marshall *et al.*).

Red-rumped Swallow is seen annually in Scotland in very small numbers from April through to November along the east coast and on islands.



Plate 171. Red-rumped Swallow, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, 6 May 2006 © Mike Pennington.

It was removed from the list of species considered by BBRC in January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a). To the end of 2004, 40 birds were recorded in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007), with a further three seen in 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007b), and nine during 2006–08. Most of these nine individuals were found in late spring and early summer with fewer in late autumn, following the established pattern of occurrence for presumed displaced migrants. More unusual was the lingering individual at Hoswick, Mainland (Shetland), which remained for six weeks from late August; this may have been because it was in heavy moult and lacking flight feathers during part of its stay.

(Eleven or 12 subspecies. Breeds widely from southern and eastern Europe eastwards across the Palearctic region, and in sub-Saharan Africa. Northern populations are migratory, wintering in Africa and southern Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western areas.)

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* 45: 3: 48

Table 24. Accepted records of Tawny Pipit in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005

Fair Isle Bunes, 23–31 May, photo (R.J. Butcher *et al.*).

2007

Outer Hebrides Smeircleit (Smerclate), South Uist, 16 June, photo (J. Bruce, M. Pollitt).

2008

Shetland Dalsetter, Mainland, 24–26 May, photo (R.M. Mellor *et al.*).

Tawny Pipit is a very rare bird in Scotland with just three records during the period 2005–08, all being presumed spring overshoots on islands.

In line with the geographical distribution of previous observations in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007), two of the sightings were on Shetland and Fair Isle. The bird seen on the Outer Hebrides was more unusual, being only the sixth for the recording area. It is perhaps surprising that this species is so rarely observed in Scotland, when compared with the closely related Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*, whose nearest breeding areas are much more remote. This may be explained by the fact that in Continental Europe, Tawny Pipit breeds in more southerly areas and thus Scotland is well north of its normal migration paths.

(Nominate *campestris* breeds in dry, sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to western Siberia; two other Asian subspecies. Winters in Africa, the Middle East and India.)



Plate 172. Tawny Pipit, Dalsetter, Mainland, Shetland, 24–26 May 2008 © Jim Nicolson.



Plate 173. Red-throated Pipit, Parks & Furse, Fair Isle, 11–16 May 2006 © Rebecca Nason.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* 142: 8: 150

Table 25. Accepted records of Red-throated Pipit in Scotland, 2005–08.

2006

Fair Isle Parks & Furse, 11–16 May, photo (J.M. Reid *et al.*).

Fair Isle Easter Lother, 12–15 October, photo (N. Green, P.A. Harris *et al.*).

Shetland Foula, 26 May to 1 June, photo (G. & D. Atherton, M. Gray, J. McMillan *et al.*).

2008

Fair Isle Wirvie, 30 May (G., J. & J. Griffiths, D.N. Shaw *et al.*).

Fair Isle Boini Mire, 23 September (J. McCallum *et al.*).

Highland Handa Island, Sutherland, 12 May, photo (C. Townsend *et al.*).

Shetland Foula, 19 September (P.R. Gordon, M.S. Scott *et al.*).

Shetland Clevigarth, Mainland, 5 October, photo (P. Derbyshire, H. Moncrieff, J.M.A. Osbourne, M.S. Scott *et al.*).

Red-throated Pipit is a spring and autumn vagrant in Scotland, found almost exclusively on islands, with most sightings on Fair Isle and Shetland. It was dropped from the list of species considered by BBRC in January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a). The number of accepted Scottish individuals stood at 142 to the end of 2004 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007), with none seen in 2005.

Since then the established pattern of incidence has continued and of the eight birds found in 2006–08, almost all were on Fair Isle and Shetland in spring and autumn. More unusually, one was on Handa Island, Sutherland (Highland), although at a typical date during the spring migration period.

(Breeds widely in northern boreal Palearctic, migrating to winter in Africa and south-east Asia.)

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* 86: 12: 98

Table 26. Accepted records of Water Pipit in Scotland, 2005–08, with late acceptances from 2004 not included in Forrester *et al.* (2007).

2004

Lothian Skateraw, 10 April, photo (M.A. Wilkinson).

Lothian Barns Ness, 16–17 April, photo (M.A. Wilkinson *et al.*).

2005

Ayrshire Hunterston Sands, 30 December to 31 Mar 2006, photo (M. McGinty *et al.*).

2006

Ayrshire Maidens, 24 November to 1 April 2007, photo (A. Hogg *et al.*).

Lothian Musselburgh, 5 March, photo (C.N. Davison *et al.*).

Lothian Skateraw, 2 April, photo (C.N. Davison *et al.*).

Lothian Musselburgh lagoons, 4 November to 4 March 2007, photo (P.R. Bould, B.A. Hickman *et al.*).

2007

Isle of May 3 May, photo (A.R. & H.T. Mainwood).

2008

Ayrshire Doonfoot, 5 March to 11 April, photo (D. Cree *et al.*).

Borders Dunglass, 17 February to 13 April, photo (D.K. Graham).

Clyde Crom Mhin marsh, Endrick Mouth NNR, two, 1 December, with one remaining to 25 March 2009, photo (I. Fulton, C.J. McInerney, J.J. Sweeney *et al.*).

Lothian Scoughall, 24–26 March (M.A. Wilkinson).

North-east Scotland Meikle Loch, 14 April (P.S. Crockett *et al.*).

Water Pipit is a rare winter visitor to Scotland, often found at coastal sites on beach seaweed, with a late-autumn arrival in November–December, followed by a second peak in spring, attributed tentatively to passage birds. The largest numbers are recorded during March–April. More than 75% of records to the end of 2004 were in Ayrshire and Lothian, with few occurrences in other areas (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Two 2004 records omitted from Forrester *et al.* (2007), together with all five in 2005 and 2006, were also in Ayrshire and Lothian, emphasising the established geographical distribution. The next two years, however, saw the proportion of Ayrshire/Lothian records dropping from three-quarters of the Scottish total to around one-third. The Isle of May individual on 3 May 2007 was the latest spring occurrence to date in Scotland. In 2008, spring birds predominated with the exception of two seen in December at Endrick Mouth NNR (Clyde); one of these stayed to March 2009. The rejection rate for descriptions of this species submitted to SBRC is relatively high, and concern about the reliability of some earlier records caused them to be discounted by Forrester *et al.* (2007).

(Nominate *spinoletta* breeds from highlands of Iberia to the Balkans and Turkey, dispersing widely in Europe in non-breeding season; two other Asian subspecies.)

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* 139: 5: 144

Table 27. Accepted records of Common Nightingale in Scotland, 2005–08. Records from the Northern Isles are summarised separately in the text.

2007

North-east Scotland Garthdee, male in song, 7 May (I. Broadbent, R. Duncan *et al.*).

Common Nightingale is a very rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland. Spring records predominate, and Fair Isle and Shetland account for the vast majority of sightings.

Of the five birds recorded during 2005–08, four were in the Northern Isles where the species is assessed by local committees. One of these was on Fair Isle on 16 June 2005, and two were on Shetland during 9–13 May 2006. The single autumn sighting was of a first-winter that appeared at Northdale, Unst (Shetland) on 14 October 2007, lingering until 22 October, a late date for the species. None were seen in 2008.

The pre-2005 Scottish total of 139 for the species (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007) includes one record of Eastern Nightingale *L. m. golzii* (previously known as *L. m. hafizi*).

(Nominate *megarhynchos* breeds from Morocco and western Europe across North Africa, southern and central Europe, Ukraine and Turkey; *L. m. golzii* from Aral Sea to Mongolia. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* 53: 2: 55

Table 28. Accepted records of Aquatic Warbler in Scotland, 2005–08.

2006

Fair Isle Boini Mire, first-winter, 16–21 September, photo (D.N. Shaw *et al.*).

2008

Shetland Skaw, Unst, adult, 4 August, photo (M.G. Pennington *et al.*).

Aquatic Warbler is a very rare early-autumn migrant to Scotland with the majority of occurrences on Fair Isle. Only eight have been recorded outwith the Northern Isles; seven of these were on the Isle of May and the single mainland record was at St Abbs (Borders) in 1977 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

As mid-August is the characteristic arrival period for Aquatic Warbler in Scotland, the first-winter bird on Fair Isle appeared at a relatively late date. In Scotland, birds aged as adults are rare (Forrester *et al.* 2007), so the individual on Unst (Shetland) in August 2008 is notable.

(Breeds from central Europe to Russia, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa.)



Plate 174. Aquatic Warbler, adult, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, 4 August 2008 © Brydon Thomason.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* many: c. 140: many

Table 29. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2005–08. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 30.

2005

Highland Isle of Eigg, Lochaber, male in song, 10 June (J. Chester).

2006

Isle of May Juvenile/first-winter, 15–16 September, photo (B. Bates, B. Etheridge *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Gramasdail (Gramsdale), Benbecula, male in song, 11 June (S.E. Duffield, J.B. Kemp *et al.*).

2007

Argyll Balephuill, Tiree, male in song, 8–10 June, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).

Highland Applecross, Ross & Cromarty, male in song, 16–19 June (A. Dickie, R. Maskew).

Isle of May Male, 12–13 June, photo (A.R. Mainwood *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Rattray Head, 31 May (D. & S. Parnaby).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Mòr (Howmore), South Uist, 29 September, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

2008

Angus & Dundee Springburn Hotel, Arbroath, male in song, 29 May (R. Bramhall *et al.*).

Borders St Abbs Head, male in song, 25–28 May (L. Barber, F. Evans, G. Garner, D.K. Graham).

Lothian Vaults Wood, Broxmouth, male in song, 29 May (T. O’Conner, C. Scott *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Newtonhill, male in song, 30 May (J.M. Collinson).

North-east Scotland Girdleness, male in song, 4 June (P.S. Crockett *et al.*).

Marsh Warbler is a scarce annual migrant to Scotland with most occurrences involving singing males in late spring; very rarely, birds remain to breed.

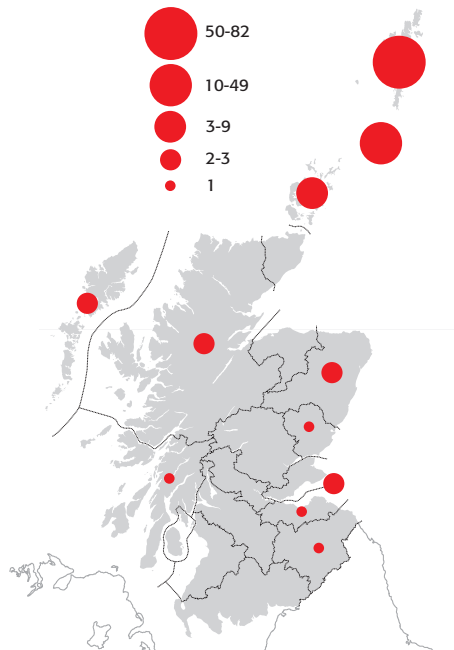


Figure 4. Distribution by recording area of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2005–08.

To the end of 2004, c. 90% of records were from the Northern Isles and, other than Caithness and the Isle of May, numbers seen in other recording areas were in single figures (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Spring occurrences in Scotland probably involve birds overshooting breeding grounds in Fennoscandia, where the population has increased (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Autumn records are rare, owing at least in part to identification challenges. There were three confirmed reports of breeding between 1993 and 2004. The species is assessed by local committees in the Northern Isles.

During the period 2005–08, more than 100 birds were seen in the Northern Isles but only 13 elsewhere in Scotland. Of the latter, one on the Isle of Eigg in spring 2005 was a first record for Lochaber (Highland), and one on Tiree in spring 2007 was a first for Argyll. Two were also seen in the Outer Hebrides: a mid-summer bird in 2006 on Benbecula, and an autumn individual in 2007 at Tobha Mòr (Howmore), South Uist. With the addition of the Applecross, Ross & Cromarty (Highland) bird in June 2007, the total of five individuals constitutes a marked increase in sightings in the west of the country.

Table 30. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2005–08, excluding breeding pairs and long-staying singing males (see text).

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2005				
Fair Isle	3	2	3–15 June	8–27 August
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	5	4	3 Jun–7 Jul	3 Sep–1 Oct
2006				
Fair Isle	4	4	11–22 June	11 Aug–11 Sep
Orkney	1	3	14–20 June	21–27 September
Shetland	5	10	9–18 June	27 Aug–10 Oct
2007				
Fair Isle	4	4	31 May–22 Jun	25 Aug–5 Oct
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	13	3	31 May–10 Jun	4 Sep–1 Oct

2008				
Fair Isle	12+	1	28 May–8 Jun	1 August
Orkney	5	-	28 May–6 Jun	-
Shetland	38+	-	28 May–19 Jun	-

Turning to the Northern Isles, records during 2005–08 conformed largely to the established pattern, although autumn birds were more frequent than spring birds in 2006. In addition to the spring and autumn occurrences shown in Table 30, breeding was confirmed in 2005 at Norwick, Unst (Shetland), where singing was first heard on 8 July and two young were fledged by one pair. Two other males were also heard in song in Shetland for more than one day, at Toab, Mainland and Baltasound, Unst; these are included in Table 30.

In 2006 and 2007, only short-staying males were noted in Shetland, though some were heard in song for several days, as was a male in Orkney, present for one week in mid-June 2006 (see Table 30). Both these years were substantially below average for Marsh Warblers in Britain as a whole, with total numbers of pairs at their lowest for more than 20 years (Holling *et al.* 2009, 2010).

In 2008 as in 2005, a pair at Norwick, Unst fledged at least two young. This pair has been omitted from Table 30, as have two long-staying singing males on Fair Isle from 24 June to 17 July 2007 and from 1 to 23 July 2008.

(Breeds Britain, France, Denmark, Fennoscandia, east through Europe to Russia; winters in sub-Equatorial Africa.)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* 52: 3: 55

Table 31. Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2005–08.

2006

Fair Isle Setter, 27 August to 2 September, photo (D.N. Shaw *et al.*).

2007

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, adult, 30 August to 8 October, photo (J. Nicolson, M.G. Pennington, G.W. Petrie *et al.*); same Easter Quarff, Mainland, 9–12 October, photo (R.A. Haywood *et al.*).

2008

Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, adult, 6–11 August, photo (J. Brown, P.M. Ellis *et al.*).

Melodious Warbler is a very rare spring and autumn migrant in Scotland, recorded in most years. The majority of occurrences (c. 75%) are in the Northern Isles, and thus the three birds in the period 2005–08 were typical. All initially appeared in August, with one remaining for six days, one for seven days, and one long-staying adult for 44 days.

(Breeds in north Africa, Iberia, France, Belgium, and south-west Germany to the north-west Balkans; migrates to winter in sub-Saharan West Africa.)



Plate 175. Melodious Warbler, adult, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, 30 August to 8 October 2007 © Hugh Harrop.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* 194: 25: 219

Table 32. Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler in Scotland, 2005–08. Northern Isles records for 2006–08 are summarised separately in Table 33.

2005 BBRC

7 birds: Highland 1, Lothian 1, North-east Scotland 1, Orkney 1, Shetland 3.

2006

Isle of May Adult female or first-summer male, 6–9 May, photo (M. Newell, C. Thaxter *et al.*).

2007

Isle of May First-summer female, 21 June to 19 August, photo (M. Newell *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Vatersay, adult male in song, 3 May, photo (C. Williams).

2008

Outer Hebrides Bàgh a' Bhaile (Village Bay), St Kilda, adult male, 6 May (S. Money).

Outer Hebrides Bàgh a' Bhaile (Village Bay), St Kilda, adult male, 22 May, photo (M. Hallet, W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Ceathramh Meadhanach (Middlequarter), North Uist, male in song, 23 May (J. Metcalf *et al.*).

Subalpine Warbler is a scarce, annual and increasingly regular migrant to Scotland. The total number of birds to the end of 2004 was 194, of which 192 were included in Forrester *et al.* (2007) and a further two, observed on Shetland in 2002, accepted more recently (Fraser *et al.* 2007c). Seven birds were seen in 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007b), after which Subalpine Warbler was dropped from the list of species considered by BBRC, although records of the eastern subspecies *S. c. albistriata* continue to be assessed by that committee. Local committees in the Northern Isles have assessed records, other than those of *albistriata*, since 2006.

Generally speaking, peak arrival (c. 90% of Scottish records) is in May, contrasting with the few autumn occurrences in August to October, and the overwhelming majority of birds (more than 80%) occur in the Northern Isles.

Table 33. Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2006–08, excluding one accepted record of *S. c. albistriata* (see text).

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2006				
Fair Isle	1	-	6 June	-
Orkney	1	-	11 May	-
Shetland	2	-	8 May–9 Jun	-
2007				
Fair Isle	1	1	23–24 May	20–29 October
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	-	-	-
2008				
Fair Isle	2	-	9–20 May	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	3	-	14–30 May	-

Records for the period 2006–08 conformed to the usual pattern, with occurrences in the Northern Isles, the Outer Hebrides and the Isle of May; no birds were seen on the Scottish mainland. Notable observations included a female that lingered for 60 days on the Isle of May during summer 2007; a bird on Fair Isle that occurred on the latest date so far recorded in Scotland (20–29 October); and the two males seen on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) in May 2008.

Most Scottish records have been assigned or assumed to be Western Subalpine Warbler (*S. c. cantillans*), with just 19 *albistriata* to the end of 2004; the latter tend to have slightly later spring arrival dates (Forrester *et al.* 2007). *S. c. moltonii* may be a potential vagrant to Britain; furthermore, vocal and plumage differences may be sufficient to merit species status, though it has been suggested that the name *moltonii* is a junior synonym of *subalpina* (Baccetti *et al.* 2007, Parkin & Knox 2010).

In the current period as in earlier years, most birds are assumed to have been *cantillans*, but only three males were specifically accepted as belonging to this subspecies: on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 11 May 2006, Fair Isle on 6 June 2006, and Foula (Shetland) on 9 June 2006. In addition, BBRC has accepted a single record of *albistriata*, a first-summer male on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) from 30 April to 11 May 2007 (Hudson *et al.* 2008), this being the 20th Scottish record of the subspecies (SBRC 2009). This brings the total number of Subalpine Warblers in Scotland during 2005–08 to 25, excluding two claimed *albistriata* from Shetland, still under consideration by BBRC.

(*S. c. cantillans* breeds from Iberia to Italy, *S. c. albistriata* from the Balkans to Turkey; *S. c. moltonii* breeds in Balearics, Corsica, Sardinia and north Italy; migrates to winter in sub-Saharan Sahel.)

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* 158: 16: 174

Table 34. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2005–08. Northern Isles records for 2006–08 are summarised separately in Table 35.

2005 BBRC

5 birds: Shetland 5.

2006

North-east Scotland Longhaven Quarry, 19–20 August, photo (M.B. Cowie, I.J. Kelman *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Findon, 20–21 August (M. Newell).

North-east Scotland Whinnyfold, 20 August (P.S. Crockett, H.E. Maggs *et al.*).

2008

North-east Scotland Cruden Bay, 20 August (J.P. Cook).

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 20 August (D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Greenish Warbler is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland. The Scottish total to the end of 2004 was 158 birds. In addition to the 156 taken into account by Forrester *et al.* (2007), this total includes two late acceptances of singles on Shetland in 2004 (Fraser *et al.* 2007c, Hudson *et al.* 2008). A further five, all on Shetland in autumn, were seen in 2005, after which the species was dropped from the list considered by BBRC (Fraser *et al.* 2007b). Local committees in the Northern Isles have assessed records since 2006.

Over the last 30 years Greenish Warbler has become an increasingly regular autumn visitor. It is generally seen in August and September, with more than 80% of sightings in the Northern Isles. Most other birds are seen on the east coast of the Scottish mainland.

Table 35. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2006–08.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2006				
Fair Isle	-	2	-	18–28 August
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	-	-	-
2007				
Fair Isle	-	1	-	20–21 August
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	1	-	21–22 August
2008				
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	-	1	-	18 August
Shetland	1	-	3–5 June	-

During the period 2006–08, there was a fairly even split of birds between the Northern Isles (six) and the Scottish mainland (five). All records for the period fit the established temporal and geographical pattern, with only one bird appearing in a month other than August. All August occurrences were within a very narrow date interval in the second half of the month, and all mainland occurrences were in North-east Scotland.

(*P. t. viridanus* breeds from the Baltic east through Russia to the Yenisei and south to Afghanistan, and winters in the Indian subcontinent and south-east Asia. There are a very few records of *P. t. plumbeitarsus* (eastern Siberia) in England.)

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* 46: 4: 50

Table 36. Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

1 bird: Isle of May 1.

2006

Angus & Dundee Gaylet Pot, Auchmithie, 15 October, photo (K. Edwards *et al.*).

Shetland Scousburgh, Mainland, 15 October, photo (N. Barlow, R. Riddington *et al.*).

2007

Shetland Toab, Mainland, 18 October (R.M. Fray, H.R. Harrop).



Plate 176. Radde's Warbler, Gaylet Pot, Auchmithie, Angus & Dundee, 15 October 2006 © Eric McCabe.

Radde's Warbler is a very rare autumn visitor to Scotland. It had occurred 46 times by the end of 2004 (Forrester *et al.* 2007), and in 2005 there was a bird on the Isle of May on 16 October (Fraser *et al.* 2007b). The species was then dropped from the BBRC list as from 1 January 2006.

Overall, around 70% of occurrences to date have been on the Northern Isles with totals from other recording areas, all on the east coast, restricted to single figures. All three in the period 2006–08 were at typical eastern and northern localities, with each bird seen on one day only. The mid-October dates were also typical of this species, which in Scotland has an average arrival date of 5 October (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

(Breeds from southern Siberia east to Sakhalin and North Korea; migrates to winter in southern China and south-east Asia.)

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* 60: 8: 68

Dusky Warbler is a rare but more or less annual visitor to Scotland, with the autumn migration period accounting for all records but one. Like its close relative, Radde's Warbler, it occurs mainly in the Northern Isles, with nearly all the remaining records on the east coast (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Four birds were seen in Scotland in October 2005: two in Shetland and one each in Borders and Lothian (Fraser *et al.* 2007b).

Since Dusky Warbler was dropped from the BBRC list from 1 January 2006, there have been four accepted Scottish records, all from the Northern Isles where local committees are responsible for assessment. All four birds arrived within the space of 11 days in October 2007, with three on Shetland from 12th–16th and one on Fair Isle from 22nd–24th.

(Breeds from western Siberia to China, wintering from the Himalayas to south China; two subspecies, with European vagrants belonging to nominate *fuscatus*.)



Plate 177. Woodchat Shrike, juvenile, Quoy & Schoolton, Fair Isle, 2–13 September 2006 © Deryk Shaw.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* 86: 7: 93

Table 37. Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005

Highland Stoer, Sutherland, male, 21–27 July, photo (C. Hill *et al.*).

2006

Fair Isle Gorson's Geo, Hoini & Pund, juvenile, 18–20 August, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

Fair Isle Quoy & Schoolton, juvenile, 2–13 September, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

Orkney Vincoin, North Ronaldsay, male, 6 May (P.A. Brown, M. Gray).

Shetland Foula, 28 June, photo (G. & D. Atherton).

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, female, 23–26 September, photo (M.G. Pennington, G. Woodburn *et al.*).

2008

Orkney Papa Westray, first-winter, 30 September to 2 October (M. Kerby).

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland, seen in all months between April and October. Most birds have been found in the Northern Isles, which during the period 2005–08 accounted for six of the seven Scottish records.

A late spring peak in Scottish occurrences represents overshooting adults, probably from populations breeding in Iberia and the near Continent. Since 1990 the majority of birds seen in the Northern Isles have been juveniles in autumn, possibly dispersing from breeding grounds in south-east Europe (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The adult male at Stoer, Sutherland (Highland) that was seen for six days in 2005 was noteworthy; mid-summer records are few, particularly from mainland Scotland.

Like a bird on Shetland in September 2003 (Forrester *et al.* 2007), the juvenile on Fair Isle in August 2006 showed characteristics associated with the eastern subspecies *L. s. niloticus*. However, there are as yet no accepted British records of this subspecies, whose diagnosability is still being evaluated (Kehoe 2006).

(Nominate *senator* breeds from north-west Africa, Iberia, France and Belgium south to Turkey; *L. s. badius* on Mediterranean islands; and *L. s. niloticus* from Turkey to Iran; winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* 330: 15 (2005–06): 345**Table 38. Accepted records of Rosy Starling in Scotland, 2005–06. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 39.****2005**

Angus & Dundee Carnoustie, adult, 7–17 July, photo (D.A. Carmichael, Mrs Maxwell *et al.*).

Clyde Islands Straad, Bute, adult female, 28–29 June, found dead, photo (I. Hopkins *et al.* per R.W. Forrester); preserved, NMS.Z 2010.22.

Highland Teangue, Skye & Lochalsh, juvenile, 8 October, photo (L. Wheatland).

2006

Argyll Columba Hotel, Iona, first-summer, 14 May, photo (A. & D. Stevens).

Outer Hebrides Stornoway, Lewis, juvenile, 27 September to 1 October, photo (A. McIver, F. Stark).

Rosy Starling is a scarce, occasionally irruptive visitor, recorded with increasing frequency throughout Scotland.

The majority of juvenile and first-winter birds occur in the Northern Isles, as would be expected for a species dispersing from breeding areas in eastern Europe and beyond, while most adult and first-summer birds appear from June to August (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Northern Isles records were assessed locally during 2005–06, and from 2007 all Scottish records have been assessed by local committees.

Table 39. Accepted records of Rosy Starling in the Northern Isles, 2005–06.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2005				
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	-	1	-	20 September
Shetland	-	2	-	2–11 September
2006				
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	-	1	-	c. 25 Sep–12 Oct
Shetland	-	6	-	13 Jul–15 Oct

In the period 2005–06, about three-quarters of the juveniles were found in the Northern Isles, in accordance with the usual pattern. Adults and immatures were recorded on the mainland and the Northern Isles in May, June and July. The adult on Bute in June 2005 was, after an 80-year gap, the second for the island, and the fifth for Clyde Islands.

Two birds are preserved as skins at NMS: the Bute bird, and a male from Baltasound, Unst (Shetland), found on 13 September 2007 (NMS.Z 2010.9).

(Breeds from the Balkans through the Middle East to Mongolia; winters from Arabia to the Indian subcontinent.)

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* many: 18: many**Table 40. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in Scotland, 2005–08. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 41.****2008**

Outer Hebrides Bàgh a' Bhaile (Village Bay), St Kilda, male, 21–23 May, photo (W.T.S. Miles, T. Bickernell *et al.*).

Ortolan Bunting is a rare but annual passage migrant in Scotland, with numbers declining substantially in recent years. Even though more than 700 were recorded between 1950 and the end of 2004, the restricted geographical distribution of Scottish records means that the species is very rare away from the Northern Isles, where more than 90% of sightings occur (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The main arrival periods are in May and September; over the last 30 years, autumn records have predominated.

In the Northern Isles, records are assessed by local committees. In the period 2005–08, only one bird was seen outwith these recording areas, a short-staying male on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides). It was the fourth for St Kilda, and the third spring occurrence there.

Table 41. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2005–08.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2005				
Fair Isle	-	1	-	12 Sep–3 Oct
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	-	-	-
2006				
Fair Isle	2	4	8–26 May	7–29 September
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	3	-	19 Sep–11 Oct
2007				
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	-	2	-	28 October
Shetland	-	1	-	25–27 August
2008				
Fair Isle	-	1	-	3–19 September
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	3	-	2–17 September

In the Northern Isles there were only two birds in spring, both on Fair Isle in May 2006, and a total of 15 in autumn, including a male and female on North Ronaldsay on 28 October 2007, just two days short of the latest date for the species in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The decline in observations in Scotland accords with the contraction of the breeding population in Continental Europe (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

(Breeds patchily from Algeria and Iberia north to Norway and east through Europe to Asia; winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* 276: 24: 300

Table 42. Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in Scotland, 2005–08. Northern Isles records for 2006–08 are summarised separately in Table 43.**2005 BBRC**

5 birds: Angus & Dundee 1, Shetland 4.

2007

North-east Scotland Foveran, Newburgh, female or first-summer male, 2 June (H.E. Maggs *et al.*).

Rustic Bunting is a scarce, annual vagrant in Scotland with the majority of birds appearing in the Northern Isles. There were 276 birds recorded to the end of 2004 (Forrester *et al.* 2007), followed by five in 2005 after which the species was dropped from the BBRC list (Fraser *et al.* 2007b). In the current period, there was a single occurrence on mainland Scotland, all others being in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally.

Table 43. Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2006–08.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2006				
Fair Isle	-	1	-	3–5 October
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	3	-	27 Sep–6 Oct
2007				
Fair Isle	1	-	31 May–4 Jun	-
Orkney	1	-	18 May	-
Shetland	2	1	30–31 May	14 October

2008

Fair Isle	4	-	19 May–1 Jun	-
Orkney	2	-	24–30 May	-
Shetland	1	2	1–3 June	17 Sep–10 Nov

In the Northern Isles there were 11 spring birds during the peak late May to early June period, which is also when the single mainland bird was seen. Similarly, the seven in autumn were generally within the main late September to early October migration period, but one at Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) on 9–10 November was only the fourth Scottish occurrence for that month.

The skin of a female found dead on Fair Isle on 19 May 2008 is held at NMS (NMS.Z 2009.34.4).

(Breeds from Fennoscandia to Siberia; winters mainly in Japan, Korea and China.)

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* 593: 61: 654

Table 44. Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2005–08. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 45.

2007

Argyll Milton, Tiree, 23 October, photo (J. Bowler).

Outer Hebrides Gleann Dail bho Dheas (South Glendale), South Uist, 19 October (J.B. Kemp).

Little Bunting is a scarce passage migrant in Scotland, mainly to the Northern Isles. The great majority of birds occur in autumn, and spring records are less than annual. A few have overwintered. The Scottish total to the end of 2004 was 593 birds (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Records of this species in the Northern Isles are assessed by local committees. In the period covered by this report, autumn totals were 22 (2005), 18 (2006), nine (2007) and eight (2008). By contrast, only two birds were found elsewhere in Scotland in autumn, both on islands.

Table 45. Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2005–08.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2005				
Fair Isle	-	7	-	25 Sep–7 Nov
Orkney	-	3	-	25 Sep–18 Oct
Shetland	-	12	-	10 Sep–21 Oct
2006				
Fair Isle	-	3	-	22 Sep–17 Oct
Orkney	1	7	27 March	24 Sep–17 Oct
Shetland	-	8	-	18 Sep–14 Oct
2007				
Fair Isle	-	2	-	7–24 October
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	7	-	28 Sep–14 Oct
2008				
Fair Isle	1	2	30 May	25 Sep–4 Oct
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	6	-	15 Sep–20 Oct

Autumn dates for all areas were generally within the normal mid-September to early October period, though one appeared relatively late on 6–7 November 2005 on Fair Isle.

Only two of a total of 61 birds during 2005–08 were not autumn migrants. One in late May on Fair Isle was typical of spring arrival, but the early date of 27 March at Deerness, Mainland (Orkney) in 2006 suggests an overwintering bird. The only other March record for Scotland was one at Tarradale, Ross & Cromarty (Highland) on 9 March 1986 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Little Bunting has increased in frequency in Scotland since the 1980s, a likely consequence of the increased breeding population in Fennoscandia (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

(Breeds from northern Fennoscandia to eastern Siberia; winters from north-eastern India and Nepal to south-east Asia.)

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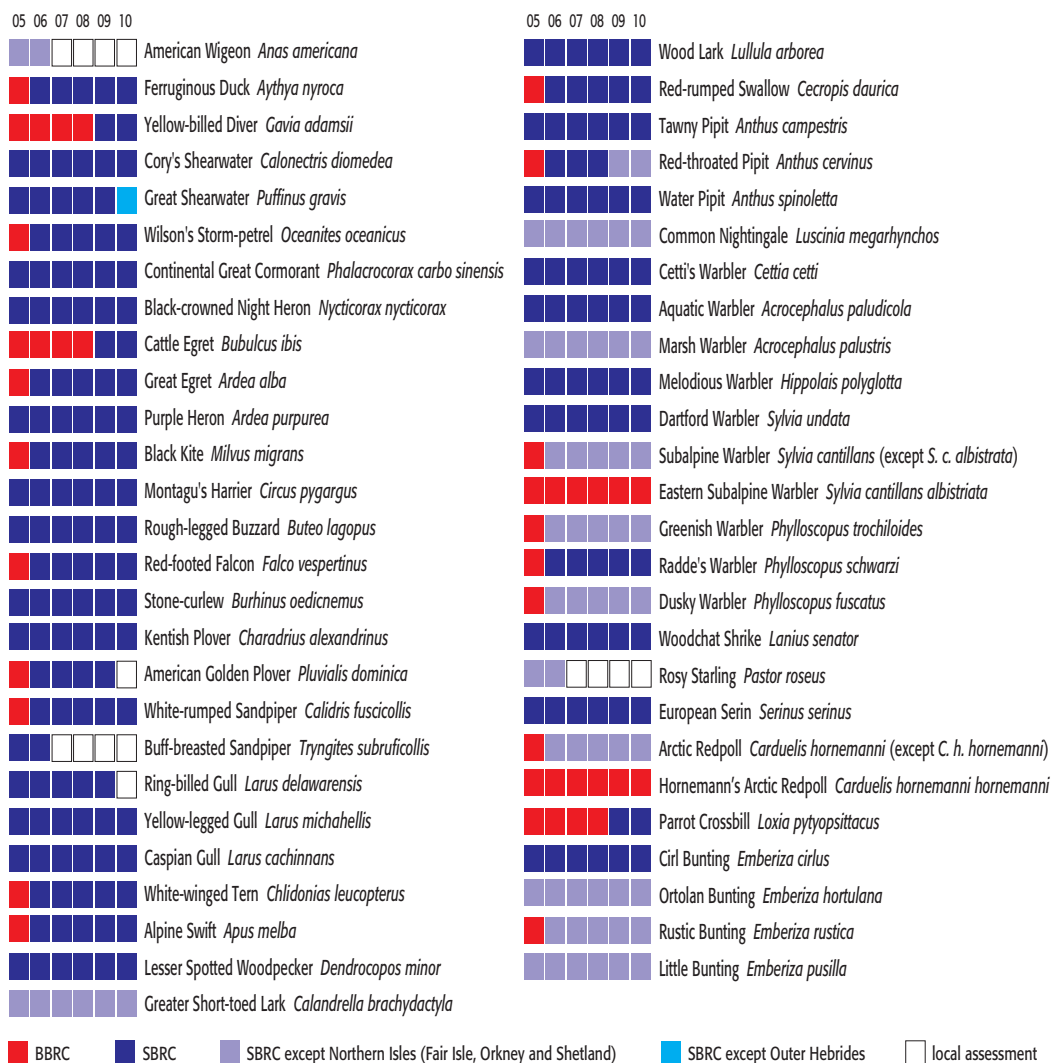
Appendix 1.

List of records regarded as not proven by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC).

- 2005:** Cory’s Shearwater Scurdie Ness, Angus & Dundee, 21 August. Fair Isle, 8 September. Girdleness, North-east Scotland, 10 September. Great Shearwater Ullapool–Stornoway ferry, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 28 August. Black-crowned Night Heron Carnshalloch, Dumfries & Galloway, 30 April. Rough-legged Buzzard Durris, North-east Scotland, 8 November. Ravensgill Dod, Clyde, 29 December. Caspian Gull St John’s Loch, Caithness, 23 November.
- 2006:** American Wigeon Loch Ryan, Dumfries & Galloway, 3 September. Purple Heron Loch Loyal Lodge, Sutherland, Highland, 27 October. Black Kite Kaimes, West Linton, Borders, 15 September. Montagu’s Harrier Aberlady Bay, Lothian, 9 May. Rough-legged Buzzard Baleshare, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 23 January. Lairg, Sutherland, Highland, 2 September to 6 October. Inverness Airport, Inverness district, Highland, 8 September. Gearraidh Gadhal (Garrygall), Barra, Outer Hebrides, 24 September. Red-footed Falcon Dalnessie Estate, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 4–5 August. Ring-billed Gull Ayr, Ayrshire, 29 January. Loch Peallach, Mull, 20 April. Rosy Starling Gatehouse of Fleet, Dumfries & Galloway, 27–28 December. Serin Peebles, Borders, 13 September.
- 2007:** Cory’s Shearwater Craignure–Oban ferry, Argyll, two, 18 May. Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 7 July. Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 27 August. Strathy Point, Caithness, 10 September. Newtonhill, North-east Scotland, 27 September. Isle of May, 28 September. Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 25 October. Great Shearwater Off Boreray, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 6 September. St Abbs Head, Borders, 27 September. Continental Great Cormorant Loch Spynie, Moray & Nairn, 20–27 October. Great Egret Gullane Point, Lothian, 26 March. Loch Creran, Argyll, 21 September. Rough-legged Buzzard Lairg, Sutherland, Highland, 25 August. Acha Mòr (Achmore), Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 16 December. Red-footed Falcon Drums, North-east Scotland, 3 June. American Golden Plover Aberlady Bay, Lothian, 4 October. White-rumped Sandpiper Sands of Forvie, North-east Scotland, 24 August. Ring-billed Gull Loch Caolisport, Argyll, 16 November. Red-rumped Swallow Baron’s Haugh, Clyde, 28 May. Tawny Pipit North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 27 September. Water Pipit Cardross, Clyde, 7 February. Broxmouth, Lothian, 20 October. Serin Loch Laidon, Perth & Kinross, 2 June. Little Bunting St Abbs Head, Borders, 10 October.
- 2008:** Cory’s Shearwater Corsewall Point, Dumfries & Galloway, 19 July. Kinnaird Head, North-east Scotland, two, 20 July. Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 29 July. Black Kite *Buchan Alpha* oil platform, Sea area Forties, 10 May. Rough-legged Buzzard Earlshall Muir, Fife, 6 May. Kilconquhar Estate, Fife, 5 October. Red-footed Falcon Stewarton, Campbeltown, Argyll, 23 May. Moulin Moor, Perth & Kinross, 26 May. Laghead, Dumfries & Galloway, 23 September. Caspian Gull Newmains, Borders, 6 March. Alpine Swift Strathclyde Loch, Clyde, 2 May. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Eisg-Brachaidh, Coigach, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 6 July. Red-rumped Swallow St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 2 June. Marsh Warbler Dubford Farm, Turriff, North-east Scotland, 23 June to 7 July. Inverugie, North-east Scotland, 30 June.

Appendix 2.

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) and other committees, 2005–08 (this report) and 2009–10. Some rare subspecies assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) are not shown.



Tristan ap Rheinallt, 21 Urquhart Gardens, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis HS1 2TX

E-mail: calidris@cix.co.uk

Christopher J. McInerny, 10 Athole Gardens, Glasgow G12 9AZ

E-mail: C.McInerny@bio.gla.ac.uk

Alan W. Lauder, BirdWatch Ireland, Crank House, Banagher, Co. Offaly, Ireland

E-mail: alauder@birdwatchireland.ie

Robert Y. McGowan, National Museums Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF

E-mail: b.mcgowan@nms.ac.uk

Revised ms accepted April 2010

Letter to the Editors

Rarities in Aberdeenshire in the 19th century

Editors,

C.J. McInerny (*Scottish Birds* 30: 27–29) is quite correct that rarities were not well documented in north-east Scotland in the 19th century. The main local avifauna of the time, *The Vertebrate Fauna of Dee* by George Sim (1903), was not part of John Harvie-Brown's series with similar titles, and the annotations in Harvie-Brown's own copy in the Royal Scottish Museum are not complimentary. There may be more reasons than a lack of faith for his and his successor's omission of records, such as a lack of knowledge.

If we consider the list of Mitchell records given by McInerny, the first, a Pied Avocet shot at Aberdeen in 1841, comes 20 years before the others, and surely does not belong in the same class. It is said to have been 'presented to Dr Fleming' (Gray 1871). John Fleming (1785–1857) was author of *A History of British Animals* (Edinburgh, 1828), and by then Professor of Natural Philosophy at Aberdeen. It is also mentioned by William MacGillivray (1852), who quotes the Rev. James Leslie of Coul (near Aboyne) and Dr Dickie of Belfast (presumably one of the family of local naturalists). If a professor, a minister and a doctor are inadequate witnesses for an Avocet, who would be enough?

The remaining list of birds reported between 1861 and 1886 would not be excessive for an active man with a gun (or many friends) in 25 years except for the four American birds in 1867. The most curious feature here is the presence of not just one but a pair of Spotted Sandpipers. Apparently on the only other occasion when more than one of these birds has been encountered in Scotland they were breeding and at least one of these birds is in summer plumage, so that it is a pity that there is not more information about them all. While sceptics may wonder whether Alexander Mitchell acquired a

parcel of American birds in 1867, others may wonder why it did not appear to happen again, and whether there was anything unusual about the weather in that year. If there was fraud involved, why was there no more of it?

While it has become fashionable to discard and suppress old records, people should remember that in doing so they are losing their history.

**W.R.P. Bourne, Ardgathe, Station Road,
Dufftown AB55 4AX**

E-mail: wrpbourne@yahoo.co.uk

Response to Letter: Rarities in Aberdeenshire in the 19th century

Editors,

I share W.R.P. Bourne's concern over the value of the historical record of ornithology in Scotland. Proof of this is the great trouble the editors took in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) to highlight past reports of birds in the older literature, much of which is not easily available to contemporary ornithologists. Indeed, a deliberate editorial policy was to ensure that a range of old records that might be considered doubtful were still mentioned.

I also agree that the 1841 Pied Avocet shot in Aberdeen Links does not fall into the same class as the 1867 American bird records which are at best unproven. However, to cite MacGillivray (1852) as describing 'witnesses' to the Avocet requires clarification. To quote:

I have not seen a specimen obtained in Scotland; but the Rev. Mr. James Leslie, of Coul, and Dr. Dickie, of Belfast, inform me that 'one was shot in the Old Town Links, Aberdeen, in 1841'.

From these words it is not explicit that either the Rev. Mr James Leslie or Dr Dickie

actually set eyes on the bird, alive or dead. As Bourne also states, Professor Fleming was presented with the specimen, but he too did not see it alive, so its provenance remains open to conjecture.

The main point of my note was to highlight the 1867 American records, which other recent publications agree should not be included on the *Scottish List* (e.g. Andrews & Naylor 2002). And, because of the doubt raised over the observer involved, other records originating from the same person, which by themselves may look plausible, including the Pied Avocet, should be considered and reviewed in this context. Also, of course, it is perhaps worth stressing that a proper review does not necessarily lead to rejection.

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Christopher J. McInerney,
10 Athole Gardens Glasgow G12 9AZ
E-mail: C.McInerney@bio.gla.ac.uk



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A photograph of Mike Warren, a wildlife artist, sitting in a grassy field. He is wearing a blue denim jacket over a dark shirt and glasses. He is looking through a green Nikon spotting scope mounted on a black tripod. He is also holding a black notebook and a pen. The background shows a line of trees under a bright sky.

Mike Warren - wildlife artist

Plate 178. *Mike at work.*

My birding began at school, The Grammar School, Wolverhampton. In a 1950s grammar school an interest and ability in art was indicative of remedial status, but the art room was my refuge. My art teacher was Charles Viner; he listened to my tales of birding and encouraged my early attempts at drawing and painting. We kept in contact over the years and he helped organise an exhibition of my paintings at the school in 2009. Sadly, he died later that year at the great age of 101.

After school, it was the College of Art, Wolverhampton. Studies there were all human orientated, so little chance to draw the natural world. One class involved drawing inanimate objects, so I added a dead drake Pochard to the collection - a small step forward. One May I skipped college to visit the Camargue with some pals, it was great birding, but I nearly got expelled. However, I later realised the trip had stirred my imagination with so many wonderful sightings and images that it was worthwhile taking the risk. After my college exams, I stayed on and produced some paintings and

lithographs of birding subjects. The staff then saw what motivated me, as these were the best work of my four years.

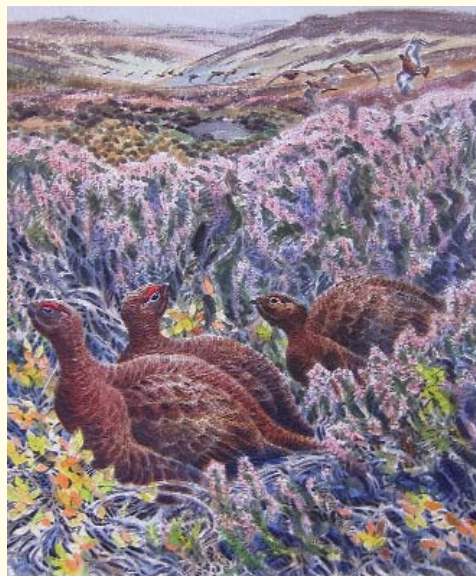


Plate 179. *Red Grouse.*

Birding continued to take a hold. Lots of local trips and exploring further afield in Britain. Early visits to Scotland were especially memorable, from the grandeur of the Cairngorms to the wonders of Caithness and Sutherland. In the early years my head was filled with images of birds from the constant field trips. At this stage my paintings were based on imagination and relied on mental recall rather than sketch references. My work was very decorative, no doubt influenced by the culture explosion of the late 1960s and early 1970s; I was on the fringe of traditional wildlife art, but people noticed my work. Eventually, in 1972, I was offered a one-man show at the Moorland Gallery, Cork Street, London. I gave up my job and painted. The exhibition of 36 paintings sold out in ten days. Two years later, it was the oil crisis and world economic gloom. Thus, I started the rollercoaster life of a professional artist.

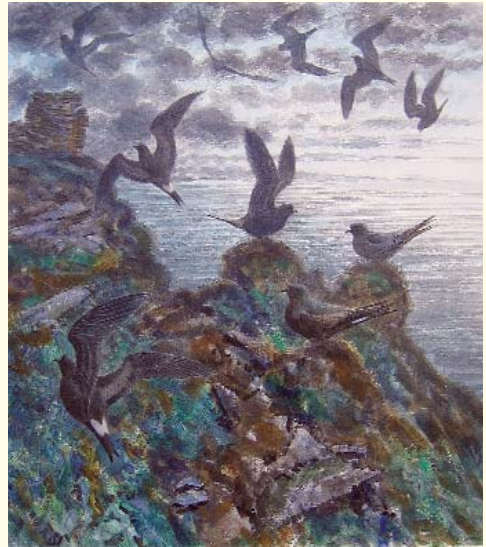


Plate 181. *Leach's Petrels, North Rona.*

As my work moved away from pure imagination, I started taking elementary field notes. I always had an abundance of ideas for paintings, but often struggled with drawing various aspects of a bird. I developed my field sketches with coloured crayons, and their reference value

continued to increase. Eventually the truth dawned, if you have good field drawings it is much easier to transfer them to a finished work. I realised that Richard Richardson had given me this advice while sitting on East Bank at Cley many years earlier. Another factor that goes



Plate 180. *Family party of Choughs, South Stack, Anglesey.*



Plate 182. *Lapland Buntings, Cairngorms.*

against sketching is the pace of birding. I might see a subject and wish to settle to do a drawing, but birding pals usually want to keep moving. It is worse to have been left sketching and suddenly hear, 'quick, over here', or the cry 'Pallas's' just as I am drawing a more mundane species. Essentially, if I am working on a project, I go birding on my own. But, if out with others, I always have a notebook should a subject

appear that requires sketching. I believe that I would have drawn a lot more in the field if I was less keen on birding.

A big spur to my field sketching arrived with the Artists for Nature Foundation, the inspiration of Ysbrand Brouwers in The Netherlands. Groups of artists were put into various environments to draw, sketch and paint. The great interaction between people who lead relatively reclusive lives was fascinating. Personally, because of these experiences, I took more interest in sketching for its own sake. I now use A5 sketchbooks and work with soft leads, usually Conte graphite, plus watercolour as necessary. The latter I now find quicker and more immediate than coloured crayons.

I enjoy all forms of birding; working my local patch in Nottinghamshire, twitching occasionally, year listing, county listing, Wetland Bird Survey and my Breeding Bird Survey square, although counting is not my favourite pastime. All the time I am in the field for these various activities there is the chance of a sighting that will develop into a painting. This can be a piece of behaviour, birds in a particular habitat, unusual combinations of species and often a brief observation will trigger an idea. One thing that never works is to go out to see a predetermined subject - it just does not happen. With regular



Plate 183. *Puffins and Kittiwakes.*

sketching over the years I have created a library of images and this is particularly useful for commissioned work. Given a request for a special subject, with luck there is a drawing available for reference.

Parallel to the sketch books, I keep a photographic reference for a great variety of habitats and landscapes which again has accumulated over the years. It is quite usual to have a request for a snow scene in summer, and spring foliage in winter. I enjoy travelling for birding, but preferably if there is an artistic purpose as well - just listing abroad holds less appeal. This usually means I come home with a shorter list of species from a particular area, but having drawn some, have then a greater knowledge of them. The furthest I have travelled for the shortest list was The Republic of Marshall Islands in the Pacific with 32 birds. The waders were most interesting with such familiars as Turnstone, Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit, but also Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, two species of tattler and Bristle-thighed Curlew. Birders are so often drawn to rarity.

I have had five books published. The first was *Shorelines* (1984, Hodder & Stoughton, London; Times Books, New York). This summed up the early aspirations of my work. The paintings were all done in acrylics, and the images were factual, but with a strong sense of design and colour. The hardness of acrylics contributed to the definite statements in my painting. Before acrylics, I had worked with chinese inks - a legacy from my graphic work at college. My second book was *Field Sketches* (1998, Arlequin Press), which was A5 size and full of facsimiles of my fieldwork. *Langford Lowfields 1989-99* (1999, Arlequin Press) was the third. This chronicled, in sketch form, the first ten years of a Tarmac sand and gravel quarry in Nottinghamshire, from a greenfield site and how the work process created habitats for birds and other wildlife at a site by the River Trent. It will ultimately become a purpose-built RSPB reserve. My fourth book was *Le Lac du Bourget* (2001, Gallimard, Paris), a sketchbook account of the lake, its environs and wildlife in summer and winter.



Plate 184. *Steppe Grey Shrike*, Nottinghamshire.

My fifth and latest book is *Images from Birding* (2007, Langford Press). This demonstrates where my birding and painting have come to after over 40 years. The paintings (78) and numerous sketches describe many birding experiences over recent years. They represent lots of fieldwork and a great deal of studio time. This is my method today; I go birding, sketch a likely subject, then create a work from there. It is very important for me to design a picture, which is why I prefer to go through this process in the studio. I do occasionally paint in the field, but it gives me less control of the finished image. All my paintings are now done in watercolour. I eventually tired of the hardness of acrylics, preferring the softness of watercolour used with graphite drawing. I use Winsor & Newton paints and paint mainly on two paper types: Fabriano HP for finer detailed subjects, and Arches Aquarelle CP/Not surface, both at 600 gsm weight. As I get older my paintings have become larger and I love tackling groups and mixtures of birds. The excitement and challenge of the subject matter is never ending.

Mike Warren

Mike will be exhibiting paintings in the Donald Watson Galley, Waterston House, Aberlady between 6 November 2010 and 12 January 2011. To see more of his work go to www.mikewarren.co.uk

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Borders:** Mr W.B. Crawford, **Clyde:** Mr I.A. Arnott, Mr J.G. Mills, Ms D. Thomson, Mr T. Wilson, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr M. Ponsford, **Grampian:** Mr A. Whitehouse, **Highland:** Mr S. Duffield, Mr D. Ferguson, Mr A. Jones, Mr N. Richards, **Lothian:** Ms A. Grant-MacDonald, Mr & Mrs N. Hayes, Mr R. King, Mrs M. Laing, Mr G. Mitchell, **Orkney:** Mr P. Higson, Mr M.J. Hoy, **Overseas:** Mr W.S. Marshall, **West Galloway:** Miss S. Alder.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are: **May: 1st** £30 D. Boomer, **2nd** £20 Mrs S. Crowther, **3rd** £10 Dr H. Hissett **June: 1st** £30 Mrs Jacobs, **2nd** £20 Mr & Mrs Hogg, **3rd** £10 A.C. Bastable **July: 1st** £30 Mr & Mrs Bielby, **2nd** £20 Mrs K. Millar, **3rd** £10 Miss J. Wilcox.

New members are always welcome. They must be over 18 and SOC members. Please contact Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

AGM and Conferences

SOC Annual Conference 2010: 29–31 October, Windlestrae Hotel, Kinross. A special student discount is available - places limited!

SOC 74th AGM: Saturday 30 October 2010, Windlestrae Hotel, Kinross at 1700 hrs.

Agenda

- 1) Apologies for absence
- 2) Minutes of the 73rd AGM held on 31 October 2009
- 3) Annual Report 2009/10
- 4) Annual Accounts 2009/10
- 5) Re-election of Office Bearers
- 6) Election of new Council Member
- 7) Appointment of Independent Financial Examiner
- 8) AOB

If you plan to attend the AGM, but not the annual conference, it would be helpful if you could let the office know for numbers. Telephone 01875 871330 or e-mail: admin@the-soc.org.uk.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference 2011: Saturday 19 March, Macdonald Marine Hotel & Spa, North Berwick (the programme and booking form will be enclosed with the December mailing).

SOC Annual Conference 2011: 28–30 October, venue to be confirmed.

The Birds of Scotland Fund

A number of applications have now been received for the SOC's *The Birds of Scotland* Fund which was established from surpluses generated by the publication of *The Birds of Scotland* in late 2007. Details of the fund and application forms can be found on the club websites at: <http://www.the-soc.org.uk/birds-of-scotland-fund.htm>.

Applications are considered in a two-staged process and three have now received first stage 'approval in principle to fund' and one has moved on to full approval. The two with initial approval are for a local atlas for the Isle of Arran and a publication on the birds of the Manor Valley, Peebleshire. The level of funding provided for these is yet to be determined.

The Birds of Scotland Fund will also make a £5000 contribution to general SOC accounts to assist with the costs of revamping *Scottish Birds* for three years. This represents around 50% of the increased costs associated with the new coloured format of *Scottish Birds* and also represents around 15% of the total value of the Birds of Scotland Fund. A decision to extend this support for a further two years will be considered in 2012.

Further applications from *The Birds of Scotland* Fund, which will support ornithological publications and special projects in Scotland, are always welcome.

SBRC Election of New Member

As usual, during November, one of SBRC's members will retire from office, leaving a vacancy on the committee. This year Dr Chris McNerny retires after a term which has seen him contribute guidelines on both Yellow-legged

and Caspian Gull identification for the SOC website and *Scottish Birds*, as well as fulfilling his record assessment role. Our thanks are due to him for his unstinting efforts on SBRC, all carried out in typically cheerful manner.

As is customary, SBRC has nominated a candidate for the vacancy, although other nominations may come from within the SOC. Our nomination this year is Dr John Bowler. John is 47 and has been employed as the RSPB Conservation Officer for the Isle of Tiree since June 2001, where he works on the island's nationally important populations of breeding Corncrakes and waders and on its internationally important assemblage of wintering wildfowl and waders. Prior to this, he was Manager of Aride Island Nature Reserve in Seychelles and a research officer at Slimbridge WWT working on migratory swans and threatened anatidae. He is an active birder and keen rarity finder, recently publishing an annotated checklist of the Birds of Tiree and Coll and sits on both the Argyll Bird Records Committee and the Seychelles Bird Records Committee (yes - also SBRC!). He has worked widely on bird conservation projects abroad, and has seen over 3,000 species of bird in some 35 countries.

As usual, any nominations from within the SOC should be submitted to HQ by the end of October 2010.

Request: Club photos 1986–2010

The past 25 years of the SOC will be documented in an article by David Clugston in the March 2011 issue of *Scottish Birds*. To illustrate this article, David is looking for good quality photographs to help him document this exciting period in the Club's history. You can help by sending in your photographs of events, outings, personalities, conferences, the move from Regent Terrace to Aberlady and indeed anything else that you think relevant. Please label each photograph with a place, month/year and photographer, and identify any individuals involved. Photographs that are not published will be deposited in the Club archives.

Please send your prints and (high resolution) scans or digital images to David c/o Waterston House, Aberlady EH32 0PY (Please do not send your large digital files by email).

Upcoming Events at Waterston House

Art exhibitions:

Chris Lodge, Jenny Matthews, Tommy Daniels, Darren Rees & Barry Van Dusen: 11 September to 3 November.

Mike Warren: 6 November 2010 to 12 January 2011.

Coming in 2011: John Busby, Keith Brockie and Darren Woodhead; plus a mixed exhibition (*Indian Expedition*) featuring Keith Brockie, John & Jane Paige, John Threlfall & Darren Woodhead, and a joint show by Szabolcs Kokay & Jonathan Latimer.

Autumn Goose Watch:

Thursday 14th & Tuesday 19 October, 4:30 p.m. Illustrated talk followed by watching geese come in to roost on Aberlady Bay nature reserve. Advance booking essential.

Optics Demo Day:

Sunday 17 October, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Branch updates

Ann Sime (Secretary, Highland Branch) change of address: 4 Culduthel House, 71 Culduthel Road, Inverness IV2 4HH, telephone 01463 236 529, e-mail: annsime503@btinternet.com.

Lothian Bird Bulletin: The Lothian Branch newsletter is back! Thanks to previous editor, Julie-Ann Goodlet Rowley, who kindly offered to take up the reins again. The September issue can be viewed/downloaded from www.the-soc.org.uk/lothian-branch.htm. If you would like to receive e-mail notification when future issues become available, please contact the office with your e-mail address if we do not already have it.

Reminder - the venue for Stewartry's 14th October meeting is the Ken Bridge Hotel rather than Kells School, New Galloway.

Addendum

Image 'P1' of Plate 148, *Scottish Birds* 30(2) June 2010, was photographed by Lindsay Cargill while attending one of Robert Rae's Crossbill ringing sessions and was therefore accidentally used without permission and wrongly credited.



Plate 185. Nuthatch at New Cumnock, Ayrshire, 2010 © Angus Hogg.

The following results stem from a request sent out recently to try to give some idea of how the Nuthatch has now spread within Scotland. We asked for first-ever sighting dates for each area and also a 2010 report. Naturally many reports may not be registered yet and some were not available, but hopefully a general picture will be formed. Many thanks to those who responded in the limited time available. The areas are listed from south to north.

Dumfries & Galloway - After sporadic records between 1976 and 1995, a bird-table sighting in that year at Threave may have indicated a pair breeding. In 1997 several records of birds visiting bird tables along the River Ken valley would suggest that breeding was established there. In 1999 the first nest was found in Garroch Glen, but this is so far inland that it's hard to believe this was the first breeding, only the first to be discovered.

In 2010, a brilliant year with lots of young birds and calling in even unexpected places. Species is now well established and can now be regarded as a common resident. It occurs even in suitable upland woods e.g. I had 6+ pairs in the Glentool-Glenhead woods this year. Now present right across the region, but they may still be absent from the southern Rhins. The total Dumfries & Galloway population would be several hundred pairs or more. (*Paul Collin*)

Borders - This was the starting region for Nuthatch sightings in Scotland. Already well established as a breeding species by 1995, we probably now have well in excess of 600–750 pairs. They are now being found in 'suboptimal' sites, places that would have been passed by during the initial colonisation. The species is now just about anywhere where one can reasonably be expected to be found. (*Ray Murray*)

Ayrshire - The first fully authenticated record of Nuthatch in Ayrshire was on 11 May 1998 at Kilkerran estate in South Ayrshire. Since that date, the species has made steady progress, first breeding at New Cumnock in 2004, where it also bred in 2010. Other confirmed breeding localities for 2010 include Culzean Country Park, Ballochmyle and probably Rozelle Park in Ayr. Several other sightings within the county e.g. Darvel and Old Dailly would appear to indicate that it is now widespread and consolidating its breeding range. (*Angus Hogg*)

Clyde Islands - One at Auchencairn, Whiting Bay, Arran on 5 May 2001; one at Glenashdale, Whiting Bay on 4 May and also 2 June 2002; and one at Corrie on 25 June 2002. These may all refer to the same bird. Old wooded glens seem to be attracting them.

In 2010, no evidence of breeding so far and no further records since 2002. Breeding habitat around Brodick Castle probably suitable. (*Bernie Zonfrillo*)

Clyde - In Lanarkshire, the original pair that arrived and bred at Dalzell Woods in 2005 disappeared last year leaving three pairs, which all bred successfully in 2010. This year, a nestling colour-ringed here in 2007, was recorded in Meikleour Blairgowrie (see ringing details on page 255). New sightings were near Carluke in 2008, Chatelherault Country Park in 2010, and two birds at Crawfordjohn in 2009–10.



Plate 186. The ringed Nuthatch currently at Dalzell, Clyde © Jimmy Maxwell.

In Renfrewshire, a sighting near Neilston in 2009 and also at Lochwinnoch. Reported at a feeder at Mugdock in 2008 and heard near Bridge of Weir in 2010.

In West Dunbartonshire/West Stirlingshire, 2010 single sightings were at Garelochhead Gartocharn, Ross Wood, Salloch and Auchendennan, Loch Lomond.

In Glasgow, Nuthatches came to feeders at Pollok Country Park in October 2008. They unsuccessfully attempted to breed in 2009 - this year is still uncertain to date. (Val Wilson)

Lothian - Up to 2003 there were nine records, and in 2005, six sites in East Lothian. Midlothian and Edinburgh. Breeding was confirmed for the first time at Smeaton, near East Linton in 2006 when birds were also at Vogrie Country Park and Roslin Glen. Here the territory first identified in 2005 has been occupied every year since with three confirmed breeding pairs in 2009. Up-river a further two breeding pairs at the Penicuik Estate. Two singing males were at the Bush Estate (2 km west of Roslin Glen) in 2008 with confirmed breeding in 2009 and a pair at Laurie's Den in 2009 and 2010. In 2010, a pair at Dalkeith Country Park, and in the South Esk Valley one confirmed and one suspected breeding pair were noted at Amiston in 2008 and 2009.

Figure 1. The distribution of Nuthatch in Lothian and Borders up to 2010 based on data from the new tetrad atlas. Supplementary records are shown where Nuthatch have been recorded outwith the atlas (from local recorders' files). Data collection is still in progress; this map is based on data entered online up to end May 2010. More detailed maps can be viewed at www.the-soc.org.uk/se-atlas

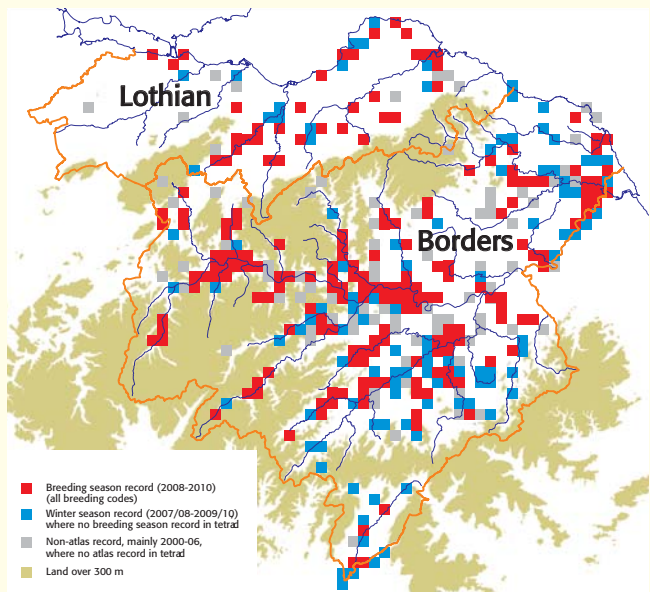




Plate 187. Nuthatch at Roslin Glen, Lothian © Neil Grubb.

Now the species is thinly, but widely, spread in mature woodland in the valleys of the Midlothian Esk, (e.g. Roslin Glen, Dalkeith Country Park and the Penicuik area) and the Tyne (e.g. Vogrie and Smeaton) and also along the East Lothian coast (e.g. Gosford Estate and Leuchie House, North Berwick). They are continuing to be seen in new areas, including within Edinburgh and West Lothian with breeding at Dalmeny Estate near South Queensferry in 2010. (*David Kelly and Neil Grubb*)

Argyll - Until recently Nuthatches were very occasional visitors to Argyll. Two isolated records in the mid-1970s, then a gap of more than 20 years before one was seen at Glebranter, Cowal in 1999. From 2006 onwards, more frequent, with isolated records like the birds at Carsaig/Tayvallich in 2006/07 and on Mull in 2008.

Since 2009, birds have been seen regularly in the Cairndow/Ardkinglas area - sometimes two together. Although we have no definite evidence of breeding yet, it seems it must only be a matter of time. An individual seen on several occasions at Tighnabruaich in May this year could be an indication that there are more about in Argyll than we know of. (*Paul Daw*)

Upper Forth - First record was in 1999 in Alva. In 2009, there were two breeding pairs in Bridge of Allan, and one at the head of Loch Tay. There was another record from Kippen. No 2010 results yet. (*Chris Pendlebury*)

Fife - The first record was in St Andrews in December 1997. There have only been seven accepted records for Fife, all in east or north, although the main colonisation will probably come from the west. The Forth seems to be a barrier for colonists. The latest sighting was in July 2009. No records so far for 2010. (*Rab Shand*)

Perth & Kinross - About five years ago, a pair was seen nest-selecting at Scone Palace and there are records each year from there. There is also good evidence of breeding at a site near Perth in 2008, a bird brought in by a cat and a pair regularly at a bird table. Occasional records from sites along the Tay as far up as Pitlochry, and a record this June from near Kindrogan in Glen Isla. (*Mike Martin*)

Angus & Dundee - No Nuthatch records so far. (*John Ogilvie*)

North-east Scotland - No Nuthatch records so far. (*Hywel Maggs*)

Highland - Only sightings to date were both in 2008: one at Overscaig, Sutherland on 5 May and one in Glengarry, Inverness-shire on 7 June. (*Al McNee*)

Moray & Nairn - The only record so far was a feeder sighting at Mosstodloch (Moray) in 2003. (*Martin Cook*)

Caithness - No Nuthatch records so far. (*Stan Laybourne*)

Orkney - No Nuthatch records so far. (*Jim Williams*)

If you have a positive sighting of a Nuthatch in summer (April–July) or winter (November–February) in a new square for this species, please submit it as a Roving Record via the www.birdatlas.net website.

Jimmy Maxwell

Ornithological research at the University of Aberdeen – what’s happening

J.M. REID

The University of Aberdeen has a long and venerable tradition of research in ornithology. The first serious studies were those of the 19th century natural historian William MacGillivray, sometimes described as the first professional ornithologist, after whom the North American MacGillivray's Warbler is named. Arthur Landsborough Thomson's launch of the Aberdeen University bird migration investigation in 1909 prompted the start of organised bird ringing in the UK, providing the foundations on which the current UK ringing scheme was built. However, it was the arrival of Vero Wynne-Edwards in Aberdeen in 1946 that marked the start of the modern research era. In his book *Animal Dispersion in Relation to Social Behaviour* he argued that animal behaviours are adaptations of groups rather than individuals; a view that prompted considerable debate among the worldwide zoological community. Until his retirement in 1974, Wynne-Edwards oversaw a burgeoning of world-class ornithological research in Aberdeen. He ran the main Zoology department where Bryan Nelson and Hilary Fry (of Gannet and Bee-eater fame) worked. He also created Culterty Field Station on the Ythan Estuary (headed by George Dunnet), and an upland research centre that was based for many years in Banchory (led by David Jenkins and Adam Watson).

Although the characters, locations and projects have changed, the University of Aberdeen remains a major centre for research in ornithology, and in ecology and evolutionary biology more broadly. Staff and students are involved in a wide range of ornithological projects designed to answer both fundamental ecological and evolutionary questions, and applied questions of direct relevance to today's conservation and management decisions. The aim of this article is to give a flavour of the main projects running today.

High-quality ornithological research relies on high-quality fieldwork, often where individual birds are marked and their behaviour, physiology, breeding success, survival, movements and other characteristics of interest are documented in detail. Increasingly, this fieldwork needs to be backed up with careful laboratory work, for example to assess genotype and genetic variation, and with computer simulations designed to turn today's field observations into predictions about the future. The field data are particularly valuable if they can be collected repeatedly for the same and different individuals across different years and environments. It then becomes possible to investigate the causes and consequences of variation in behaviour and life-history; how do the characteristics of individuals change over time or differ among habitats? Is this variation due to genes or environment or both? How does variation in individual behaviour and life history combine to affect the population's response to environmental change? It is by answering these kinds of questions that we can



Plate 188. Lucy Quinn with a Fulmar on Eynhallow, Orkney. Where will this one go to forage? © Paul Thompson.

start to understand the processes that shape the size and location of the bird populations we see today, and predict the likely consequences of environmental changes we expect to occur in the future. Today's researchers at the University of Aberdeen are fortunate in being able to draw on the University's heritage of long-term bird ringing and field studies; University researchers run several such studies, and have strong links to external groups who run other long-term studies. Coupled with the technical expertise in ecological statistics, molecular genetics and simulation modelling among Aberdeen's current research staff, there is exciting potential to answer major questions in ornithology and ecology. Some projects that were founded by the 20th century research pioneers continue today, albeit with new and modern twists. New projects have also been started, reflecting the interests of a new generation of researchers.

Perhaps the most famous ongoing project is the 60-year study of Fulmar population ecology on the Orcadian island of Eynhallow. This study was started by George Dunnet in 1950 and is now co-ordinated by Paul Thompson of the University's Lighthouse Field Station in Cromarty. The 60-year dataset provides a valuable opportunity to explore the impacts of climate variation on seabird population dynamics. The number of Fulmars breeding on Eynhallow has decreased markedly since the 1980's. Detailed analyses of observations of ringed individuals have shown that this decrease reflects decreases in both survival and breeding success, and also show that year to year variation in both survival and reproduction is correlated with large scale climate variation. Fascinatingly, these analyses also show that female survival is more sensitive to climatic variation than male survival. PhD student Lucy Quinn (Plate 188) is using a combination of state-of-the-art dataloggers and biochemical analyses to investigate whether this might be because male and female Fulmars forage in different areas, or take different prey, potentially meaning that males and females are affected differently by climate. Initial data already show that different Fulmars forage in different areas across enormous ranges; Eynhallow breeders regularly travel as far afield as Greenland and northern Norway. Lucy is currently fitting more

Fulmars with dataloggers so that she can compare male and female foraging patterns.

A second famous Aberdeen project, investigating the causes of Red Grouse population cycles, is also continuing and benefiting from modern technology. Stuart Piertney used molecular genetic techniques to measure the genetic relatedness between male grouse occupying adjacent territories in Glas Choille, and hence how the kin structure of the grouse population changed through their 'boom and bust' variations in population size. He found that male grouse tend to acquire territories next to their relatives as population size increases, but that this kin structure breaks down as population size peaks. This work contributed to the long-running debate about whether the booms and busts are caused primarily by male territoriality or parasite infections. The latest work on this topic, involving Steve Redpath, Jesus Martinez (Plate 189) and theoretician Mo Zeineddine, aims to determine whether behaviour and parasites could in fact work together to drive grouse population cycles, and whether the relative importance of these two driving forces might in turn depend on environmental conditions (particularly rainfall).



Plate 189. *Jesus Martinez and Sonja Ludwig assessing the physiological state of a Red Grouse © Lorenzo Perez-Rodriguez.*

Also drawing on long-term effort is ongoing research on Starling population ecology on the famed island of Fair Isle. Peter Evans has been colour-ringing and monitoring Fair Isle's Starlings since 1980, providing a wealth of data on individual breeding success and survival. Together with Peter and Jane Reid, PhD



Plate 190. *Jessica Walkup ringling a Starling chick on Fair Isle © Peter Evans.*

students Daisy Brickhill and Jessica Walkup (Plate 190) are using this system to investigate the consequences of small-scale habitat variation for Starling breeding success, survival and movements, to measure natural selection on bill and body size, and hence to understand how habitat variation can shape the structure of bird populations.

Ornithological research at the University of Aberdeen is certainly not restricted to Scotland, or even the UK. Jane Reid and PhD student Rebecca Sardell work on a population of Song Sparrows on Mandarte Island in Canada. This population has been studied intensively since 1975; all breeding attempts have been closely monitored and every single sparrow has been individually colour-ringed. Since 1993, a small drop of blood has been collected from each



Plate 191. *Rebecca Sardell taking a blood sample from a Song Sparrow chick on Mandarte Island, Canada. Who was this one's father? © Rebecca Sardell.*

chick (Plate 191). Rebecca extracted DNA from all these blood samples, totalling 2,200 chicks over 16 years, genotyped every individual, and used these data to identify each individual's true genetic father. Even though Song Sparrows are socially monogamous, Rebecca discovered that 28% of chicks were in fact fathered by a male other than the female's social mate, uncovering a surprising world of genetic promiscuity underneath the apparent social monogamy. Further analyses of these data showed that extra-pair fathers tend to live on territories next door to the female whose offspring they sired, and that a female's tendency to mate with an extra-pair male has a genetic as well as environmental basis.

A bit closer to home, Xavier Lambin and Alexandre Millon are working with Steve Petty and the Northumberland Ringing Group to investigate the life histories of Tawny Owls in Kielder Forest. Using another impressive long-term dataset, they have found that older owls are less likely to survive than younger owls, perhaps reflecting increased risk of Goshawk predation with increasing age. Surprisingly, they found that the density of voles (the owls' main prey) available at birth does not seem to influence an owl's chance of surviving beyond its first winter, or its breeding success later in life. Their next objectives are to investigate how owls move around Kielder and beyond in response to vole numbers and, together with theoretician Justin Travis, to use the owl data to develop theories predicting how predator dispersal would be expected to evolve in relation to changing prey abundance.

Indeed, the theme of understanding bird movements and dispersal runs through several other Aberdeen projects, many of which have benefitted from close links with Grampian Ringing Group, the Raptor Study Groups and other enthusiasts. These include Ewan Weston's PhD study of dispersal in Golden Eagles (carried out in conjunction with Natural Research) (Plate 192), Alex Komissarova's PhD study of winter migration in relation to habitat and food availability in Robins and Emily Barlow's PhD study of dispersal in Shags (both carried out in conjunction with the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology).



Plate 192. Ewan Weston satellite-tagging a Golden Eagle. Where will this one go? © Robert Rae.

The aim of the above research projects is to understand fundamental principles of how natural populations work - be they of birds or other taxa. If such pure ecological research can help us understand how populations work in general, then that knowledge and understanding should help us decide how best to manage specific populations of conservation or economic importance. However, when faced with specific management decisions, research that is more tightly focused on answering the question at hand becomes invaluable. Accordingly, the theme of using high-quality ornithological research to inform conservation and management policy runs through many University of Aberdeen projects.

Jane Reid has been working with the Scottish Chough Study Group to investigate why the number of Choughs on Islay has been declining, and to identify effective conservation strategies (Plate 193). Analyses of the SCSG's long-term data show that year- to-year variation in survival from fledging to age one has a major influence on the number of Choughs on Islay. Furthermore, an individual fledgling's chance of surviving depends on when it fledged (Choughs fledged in some years survive better than others), and also on exactly where it fledged. Interestingly, Choughs

fledged from some specific nest sites are much more likely to survive than from other nest sites. These analyses have also shown that first-year survival has recently been worryingly low, primarily due to very high mortality during late summer and early autumn. These insights are being used to influence the nature, location and timing of Chough conservation policy on Islay. Focusing on another species of increasing conservation concern, the Cuckoo, PhD student Chloe Denerley is studying the influence of land management on Cuckoos in north-east Scotland to investigate whether changes in host parent abundance, or in prey abundance, are behind the large-scale decline of Cuckoos in the UK and beyond.

One topic that is currently prompting considerable debate is the possible negative impact of marine renewable energy generation on seabird populations. As energy generation developments move further offshore, it becomes increasingly challenging to collect sufficient data to assess the likely impacts on birds. PhD student Kate Brookes studied the impact of two 5 megawatt turbines installed in the Moray Firth. Working from a nearby oil platform (Plate 194), she tested the potential for using radar to collect data on seabird activity and flight patterns around turbines. She also conducted visual surveys to investigate whether turbine installation affected seabird abundance.



Plate 193. Jane Reid looking for colour-ringed Choughs on Islay. How well will this year's fledglings survive? © Su Reid.

With similar questions in mind, Beth Scott and PhD student Rebecca Langton are studying the impact of tidal stream and wave power generators on the daily energy intake and expenditure of seabirds and their chicks. Focusing on the Pentland Firth where substantial marine renewable developments are planned in an area that holds multiple seabird colonies, they aim to estimate the effect of these installations on seabird foraging ecology and energy expenditure, and so predict whether proposed developments are likely to affect seabird breeding success or survival sufficiently to reduce population size. Their data are influencing planning decisions regarding future wind and tidal power developments. A second study, conducted on the Isle of May by PhD student Evelyn Philpott and engineers from Robert Gordon University, aims to assess the viability and impact of using a tidal energy turbine to provide all energy required on the island. The project aims to relate seabird foraging behaviour to water current speeds and directions and other oceanographic features that affect both birds and turbines.



Plate 194. *Kate Brookes monitoring seabird movements in the Moray Firth by sight and by radar.*
© Paul Thompson.

Combining fundamental and applied research, studies of birds increasingly need to be combined with investigations of their role in wider ecosystems. For example, long term studies on the Forth islands have revealed that birds can greatly influence the local vegetation and soil communities. In the late 1970s, the Aberdeen researchers Sobey and Kenworthy identified aggressive plucking of vegetation by Herring Gulls during territorial disputes as the main cause of the disappearance of sea

campion (*Silene maritima*) from the Isle of May. More recently René van der Wal and his collaborators have discovered that changes in numbers of seabirds and rabbits are responsible for dramatic recent changes in the island's plant communities. The large amounts of nitrogen that fish-eating birds introduce into such island ecosystems has not only increased total vegetation growth, but also allowed the Atlantic-Mediterranean tree mallow (*Lavatera arborea*) to invade the seabird islands Fidra and Craighleith. Detailed studies on Craighleith revealed that through their burrowing, Puffins provide ideal germination conditions for tree mallow, helping its expansion. In 2003, 85% of Craighleith was covered in tree mallow stands up to 3 m high, leading to the eviction of Puffins; thus, ironically, these seabirds managed to dig their own grave!

Impacts of birds on their environment have also been the theme of René van der Wal and Sarah Woodin's 10-year study of Pink-footed Geese in high-arctic Svalbard. Here, an increasing population of Pink-footed Geese enthusiastically eat below-ground parts of their food plants, thereby digging up considerable areas of wet tundra. This digging influences plant productivity and even carbon sequestration within the arctic. However, the long-term consequences of such destructive foraging for the geese themselves remain unclear and are currently being investigated by PhD student Helen Anderson.

In summary, ornithological research at the University of Aberdeen covers a wide range of species, from seabirds to raptors to passerines, and a wide range of questions, covering both pure and applied topics. We have strong links with many collaborators, including academics from around the world, private companies, governmental and non-governmental conservation organisations, and amateur birding and ringing enthusiasts. This network supports excellent current research, and provides ample opportunities for ornithological research in the future. Aberdeen is certainly an exciting place to be for an ornithologist! Further information about our work can be found at www.abdn.ac.uk/ibes/research/ecology/.

Jane M. Reid
E-mail: jane.reid@abdn.ac.uk

NOTES AND COMMENT



Plate 195. The artificial Dipper nest site © Tom Dougall.

Dippers accept Council's help

In *SBN* 89 (September 2008), I reported that Scottish Borders Council had provided a replacement nest site for Dippers (Plate 195), following the destruction of the former traditional site during essential bridge repairs in 2007.

In 2008, Dippers nested nearby, but the nest box was used successfully by Pied Wagtails. In 2009, neither Dipper nor Pied Wagtail used the site.

Despite the atrocious winter of 2009/10, I was pleased to find a Dipper nest $\frac{3}{4}$ built on 24 March 2010. Due to a huge dump of snow on 30 March, I wasn't able to visit the nest again until 4 April, when it was found to be lined prior to a clutch being laid. There were five eggs on 15 April, five chicks two to three days old on 2 May, and these were ringed by Elisa Smith on 8 May. Unfortunately, by the time of my next visit on 15 May, two of the chicks were (fairly recently) dead in the nest and there was no sign of the other three.

At least this artificial site has been accepted by the local Dippers, but hopefully they will be a bit more successful in future.

Tom Dougall

More Ospreys and geese

The events related in the item *Osprey eyrie taken over by Greylag Geese* in *Scottish Birds* 20: 142–143, echo closely an incident near Crieff, Perth & Kinross in 2008.

On 27 April that year, while searching for spring migrants I reached a position from which an Osprey eyrie, situated atop Alders on a very small island, is visible. To my surprise the eyrie was occupied by two Canada Geese, assumed to be a pair, though one soon dropped off the nest platform to join two other adults on the water below - this in response to 'mobbing' by a flying Osprey. A second Osprey, carrying a fish, then joined in the harrying of the remaining goose. A Carrion Crow briefly entered the fray, perching close to the eyrie, but was soon chased off by one of the Ospreys - the fish-carrier - and the pursuit took them out of my view.

The first Osprey meanwhile continued to dive at and sweep past or low over the goose on the eyrie. It never went very close and made no attempt to strike out with its feet. This goose, which was standing up throughout, was made of sterner stuff. It simply ducked, lowering its head and neck each time the Osprey passed. After a while the Osprey ceased its 'attacks' and flew off, whereupon the goose settled, shuffling as though on eggs. Eventually, this Osprey reappeared and landed in a waterside tree not far from the eyrie.

The fish-carrying Osprey, still with its burden, also came back into view after a time and both Ospreys then drifted away, harried by Carrion Crows, without having shown any more interest in reclaiming the eyrie.

I was unable to revisit the site until 14 June and then found an adult Osprey sitting on the eyrie. Had they succeeded in driving off the geese or had they been obliged to wait until the goose family had departed in their own good time? Another Osprey was seen perched briefly in trees south-east of the Pond from where it soared up with two others, but there

are other eyries in the vicinity from which birds visit this water to fish. Later the bird on the eyrie stood up for quite a lengthy period and another bird, which had perhaps been perched nearby, appeared low over the water and then landed on the eyrie. It did not bring a fish, but appeared to start feeding on the eyrie - or perhaps feeding young.

David Thorogood

Darker doves on St Kilda

When I visited Hirta, St Kilda on 19 May 2009, I took some photos of three dark-looking Collared Doves which were feeding on the ground behind the MOD buildings (Plates

196–198). I was surprised to see this species in such a remote location, but the overall darker plumage was quite noticeable. Some of these darker birds were recorded on St Kilda in 2008 and there is a note by Will Miles on this in the September 2009 issue of *British Birds* (102: 512). The NTS warden thought that the discoloration may have been due to the fact that these birds had taken to roosting at the top of the chimney that had been specially constructed to clear the exhaust from the MOD diesel generators.

Sam Alexander



Plates 196–198. *Collared Dove*, (top two images) St Kilda, May 2009, (bottom) two adults, Cults, North-east Scotland, March 1994 © Sam Alexander.

BIRDSPOT - Goosander or Merganser?

I.J. ANDREWS

In summer and early autumn, all the Goosanders and Red-breasted Mergansers you will see are 'red-heads'. The males leave the females to moult soon after pairing. So, during this period, we are left with separating them without the males being present to help identification. By July, the young birds can also be adult sized; soon to become independent. Given reasonable views and experience the species are quite different.

The most often quoted feature for identifying a Goosander is that the chestnut colour on the head ends abruptly at the neck and contrasts neatly with the much paler chest (Plate 199). The key is the clear demarcation line. In a Merganser the head is duller brown and this merges gradually into the mucky-grey on the neck and body (Plate 201). The neck of the Goosander is also thicker, compared to the rakish Merganser, which is also smaller overall.

The Goosander's bill is broader-based and distinctively droops down at the tip, but in Red-breasted Merganser it is thinner and often swept up.

The crest shape also differs, but with the caveat that wind and the birds' behaviour can affect the crest shape. In Goosander, the crest is typically thick (sometimes likened to a mane) and extends backwards as if blown by a strong wind (even if it isn't) (Plate 200). The shaggy and wispy crest of the Merganser is untidy in comparison, and often gets blown up



Plates 199–200. Goosander, Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, March 2010 © Mike Thrower. Probably a first-winter bird based on eye colour and vestiges of stripes on the face.

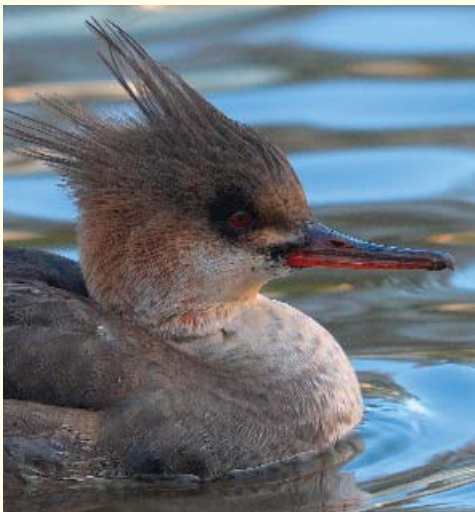
in the wind (Plate 202). The Goosander also often shows a steep forehead and with the crest, this gives a more angled head shape.

Mantle colour can also be a clue. In Goosander, it is a more uniform mid-grey; but in Merganser it tends to be darker with blackish mottling.

The Merganser has an eccentrically untidy appearance and is smaller and thinner. The Goosander is a much smarter looking bird, even in female/immature plumage.



Plate 203. Adult female (behind) and immature (front) Goosander, Musselburgh, Lothian, October 2009 © Ian J. Andrews.



Goosanders also have a distinctive habit when fishing in shallow water. As a group, they scuttle or swim along with their heads and necks low in the water.

Juvenile and immature Goosanders have diagnostic tiger-stripes on their face (Plate 203). The female has a pale chin, but in young birds, there is also a pale stripe from below the eye to the bill, separated from the chin by a dark line - much as on a female Ruddy Duck. This feature can be discernible through the winter. A difference in eye colour can also be seen at close range (Plate 203). In young birds, the eye is pale-brown with a dark pupil; in adults the eye is all dark.

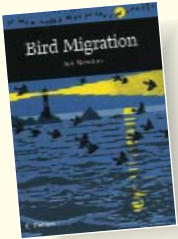
Ian J. Andrews



Plates 201–202. Red-breasted Merganser, Edinburgh, Lothian, January 2010 © Mike Thrower.

BOOK REVIEWS

Bird Migration. Ian Newton, 2010. New Naturalist, Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-730731-9, 598 pages, softback, £30.00, hardback £50.00.



This is Ian Newton's latest synthesis of our current understanding of aspects of ornithology, following his works on population

limitation, speciation and biogeography, and migration ecology. In the Foreword, Ian states that "migration has repeatedly prompted familiar questions" about what birds are doing when undergoing in their movements across the globe. Well here are the answers. While his previous publications were aimed at the academic market, this book is aimed at a wider market and is published under the New Naturalist series.

In almost 600 pages of lucid text, these questions are examined and the explanations teased out, using a wealth of up-to-date knowledge (the bibliography alone runs to 30 pages). The recent advances in our understanding of bird movements that have followed in the wake of developments in the technologies associated with the likes of data loggers and satellite tagging are well utilised.

Migration is mainly examined from a UK perspective, but examples from all over the world are used extensively to illustrate points. I particularly enjoyed the middle section of the book where vagrancy, the evolution of migration, recent changes in

migratory behaviour and the legacy of the glaciations are discussed. These areas, when associated with our forebodings concerning forthcoming climatic change, were riveting.

Each chapter is concluded with an excellent summarising section that typically raises issues that remain unresolved in our understanding of migration.

My only adverse criticism might be with the appearance of the book. It feels cramped and both the text and photographs (many by Edmond Fellowes) deserve a more lavish presentation. However at just £30 for the softback, this represents an excellent investment and will answer some, but not all, of the mysteries of bird migration.

Ray Murray

The Peregrine, Hill of Summer and Diaries - the complete works of J.A. Baker. 2010. Collins, ISBN 978-0-00-734862-6, hardback, 191 pages, £20.00.



This book combines The Peregrine (1967), The Hill of Summer (1969), both long out of print, and some of

Baker's diaries, now published for the first time. Baker is regarded by some as the finest wildlife writer of the 20th century, so for collectors of such material this book will be a must.

John Law

Collins Bird Guide (2nd edition). Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney & Dan Zetterstrom, 2009. Collins, ISBN 978-000-726726-2, hardback, £25.00, ISBN 978-000-726814-6, paperback, £17.99.



Since the first edition of this book appeared in 1999 it has been widely regarded as the best Britain & Europe field guide we have. In this new edition the text, descriptions and illustrations have been revised in a few details, but remain much the same, so we can continue recommending it to our friends; but do the many SOC members who will have the old one need to buy the new?

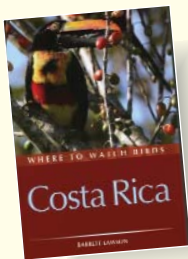
There are a number of changes, some more concerned with the way we think about the birds than with the birds themselves. The species order has been modernised, with swans coming before grebes and divers, several subspecies are now treated as full species, the feral introductions list has been revised and a few species are new to Europe. Otherwise, the most obvious changes are in the distribution maps which have almost all been redrawn. They are (and always were) very detailed for ones necessarily so small, and a speck of a different colour on the middle of (say) France must be difficult to relate to a road atlas map. How useful is such detail at this scale, and how will such changes look anyway in another ten years? It seems a pity if the information

can't be made easily available, but that would need a very much bigger book.

For all serious birders, and any others needing the full detail, this new edition is a must, while libraries should buy this to keep up to date and keep the old one as well, for historical interest.

John Law

Where to watch birds: Costa Rica. Barrett Lawson, 2009. Christopher Helm, A. & C. Black, London, ISBN 978-1-408-12512-0, paperback, 366 pages, £19.99.



Travelling birders will be familiar with the 'Where to watch birds' series. Despite an American publication

that may be out of print and a DVD series, this appears to be the first birding guide to Costa Rica that has appeared worldwide, and hence available to someone contemplating a visit to the country. It sure beats having to graze through the various websites for trip reports to develop a possible route of tackling this small Central American country where more than 850 species have been recorded.

There is an excellent introduction to the country. It discusses the avifauna, and lists all the issues about visiting the country and birding in tropical conditions.

The country is then divided into six biogeographical regions and each region receives a general introduction and a list of

speciality species to be looked for. It then goes on to discuss individual sites and once again there is a list of the specialities as well as a general list of what is to be recorded. On checking with my own site lists from my visit two years ago, I found these lists were pretty good and held the majority of the species I saw. There was no long tail of species, recorded once in a blue moon at the site, that bedevils these 'where to watch birds' publications. These lists can be really annoying, and lead one to false expectations of what might be encountered. One useful innovation is a grading of the various trails by difficulty.

All in all, this is a useful addition to the genre.

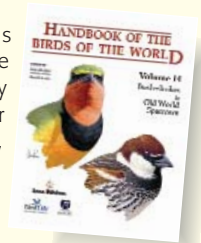
Ray Murray

Handbook of the Birds of the World Volume 14: Bush-shrikes to Old World Sparrows. Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott & David Christie (eds), 2008. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, ISBN 978-84-96553-50-7, 896 pages, £185.00.

Never mind the quality feel the width! This is the fourteenth massive volume in a gigantic series, which will soon culminate with the publication of the sixteenth and final volume. But what quality - it is magnificent and the series forms what is probably the greatest book on birds that there has ever been.

Volume 14 runs to 896 pages, each 310 x 240 mm. The species accounts are illustrated by 51 colour plates painted by seven of the world's foremost bird artists; Norman Arlott, Hilary Burn, Ian Lewington, David Quinn, Chris Rose, Brian Small and Tim Worfok. A staggering total of 657

photographs illustrate the introductory chapters for each family, some of which are simply breathtaking.



A total of 17 families (Bush-shrikes, Helmet-shrikes, Vangas, Drongos, New Zealand Wattlebirds, Stitchbird, Mudlarks, Australian Mudnesters, Woodswallows, Butcherbirds, Bristlehead, Bowerbirds, Birds-of-paradise, Crows, Oxpeckers, Starlings and Old World Sparrows) are covered. The text for each family is written by a guest author who in most cases is the leading world expert on that group of birds. An indication of the research that has gone into this volume is the fact that there are more than 6,000 bibliographical references.

For each family there is a detailed introductory section, with sub-sections for systematics, morphological aspects, habitat, general habits, voice, food & feeding, breeding, movements, relationship with man, and status and conservation. This is often a major treatise, providing an amazing amount of detail. In all cases the introductory chapter is very readable, but provides a wealth of information about the family.

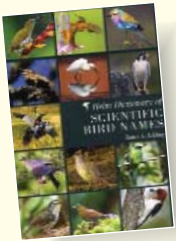
The family introduction is followed by individual species texts. For each species, information is provided on taxonomy, subspecies, distribution, descriptive notes, habitat, food and feeding, breeding, movement, status and conservation, and there is a distribution map. This is a concise account, but very useful and informative. There is also at least one colour illustrations painted by one of the artists.

The amount of information within this book is difficult to convey to someone who has never seen any of the previous volumes, but by way of example, the crow family, containing 123 species runs to 148 pages. There are 119 photos within the 72-page introduction section. All species are then illustrated on ten beautiful and accurately depicted plates painted by Brian Small and David Quinn.

Whilst many Scottish birdwatchers might find a bias towards species found in southern Asia and Australasia, crows, starlings, sparrows and shrikes provide local interest and the rest act as a spur to travel even more than before. Who wouldn't want to see bowerbirds, birds-of-paradise and vangas?

Ron Forrester

Helm Dictionary of Scientific Bird Names. James A. Jobling 2010. A. & C. Black, ISBN 978-1-4081-2501-4, hardback, 400 pages, £40.00.



Have you ever wondered about the origins of the name 'oenanthe' (the Wheatear), or why the Pink-footed Goose is 'brachyrhynchus'? Perhaps you find scientific names confusing, literally a foreign language. This *Helm Dictionary* is a clear and fascinating guide through these difficult waters.

Jobling devotes an introduction of 11 pages to an explanation of the principles and history of scientific names from the 1758 tenth edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*. He explains the structure of names and

introduces the different categories of names used. For example, a 'morphonym' refers to physical features: 'citronella' is a 'small yellow' bird; whereas a 'phagonym' tells you what it eats: 'arachnothera' is a 'hunter of spiders'.

The main part of the book is a dictionary embracing every scientific name of all the birds in the world. It is not a systematic list of all bird species, nor is it a concordance of scientific names with their English counterparts, but it is a comprehensive account of the meanings and usages of all scientific names. In some cases, there is an outline of the history and rationale of a name: who called the Dotterel 'morinellus', the 'foolish bird', and why? While many names are based on Greek and Latin words, there are also explanations of those from other languages.

Most of all, this is a reference work for those who are 'fascinated by birds and words', but it will have a much wider appeal. At its price, it will not find its place on the shelves of every bird-watcher, though it is a book that many will want to consult. Every library should certainly possess it.

Ian Ebbage

Seton Gordon's Cairngorms: an anthology. Hamish Brown (ed.), 2010. Whittles Publishing, ISBN 978-1904445-88-3, hardback, 193 pages, £25.00.

This is the second anthology of Seton Gordon's work compiled by Hamish Brown (*Seton Gordon's Scotland* was reviewed in *SBN* 79 Mar 2006). The format is the same - a selection of excerpts chosen from Gordon's vast output of 27 books, grouped by subject,

so that one chapter may contain paragraphs from up to five books. There are chapters on topography, natural history and the folklore of the area and many of his own photographs (these were at taken first with a cumbersome half-plate camera), photographs of birds engaged in many activities, of Seton and his companions walking and climbing, of the people who worked on the hills and of snowfields. His comments on the existence and extent of these add an historical perspective to present worries about climate change.

Anthologies can only provide a taster; if your appetite is whetted by this book, SOC Waterston Library has most of his books.

Harriet Trevelyan

Fair Isle Through the Seasons. Malachy Tallack & Roger Riddington, 2010. Z.E. Press, ISBN 978-0-9565526-0-0, 109 pages, £15.00. All proceeds split between Fair Isle Bird Observatory and Fair Isle Community Trust.



This short book has excellent photographs of wildlife and human activity on Fair Isle, with extended captions. A fine souvenir for the one-time visitor.

John Law

RINGERS' ROUND-UP

R. DUNCAN

Welcome to the second Scottish Ringers' Round-up (see Scottish Birds 30: 58–63 for the first). The intention is to summarise and promote some of the valuable and fascinating information generated by bird ringers and birdwatchers through selected ringing recoveries, photographs and short articles presented here. There is also a Request for Information section where we can all contribute by looking out for and reporting colour-marked birds from featured projects, as well as the many others currently in progress. If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles or projects which you would like to be included in the next issue, please e-mail to Raymond Duncan by early September at Raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk. Thanks go to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the many ringers, ringing groups and birders who provided the information for this latest round-up. Thanks also to the many birdwatchers who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them.

Selected ringing recoveries

Age/sex: 1 nestling, 3 hatched during calendar year of ringing, 4 hatched before calendar year of ringing but exact year unknown, 5 hatched during previous calendar year, 6 hatched previous calendar year but exact year unknown. **f** = female, **m** = male.

Circumstances: **x** found dead, **+** shot or intentionally killed by man, **F** - fresh, **L** - not recent, **VV** ring read in field, **R** caught and released by ringer, **N** nesting.

Pink-footed Goose

A13 3f 27/03/07 Vest Stadil Fjord, DENMARK VV 24/04/10 nr Cruden Bay, North-east Scotland

E3U 6f 30/03/05 Vest Stadil Fjord, DENMARK VV 11/04/10 Hatton of Fintray, North-east Scotland
Birds ringed in Denmark are from the Spitsbergen population and are unusual in the UK. There were an exceptional number of these in Scotland in spring 2010 and in England earlier in the winter. Perhaps due to the exceptionally snowy weather here and on the continent.

Greylag Goose

OEB 6f 05/06/00 Yddingen, SWEDEN VV 17/05/10 Rattray Head, North-east Scotland
Since ringing in 2000 this bird had remained chiefly in Sweden with the occasional winter sighting in Denmark or the Netherlands. It was first seen in UK at Druridge, Northumberland on 28 February 2010 then Yorkshire in April. In May it turned up in Bedfordshire and Essex before getting its bearings sorted out and arriving in North-east Scotland, presumably ahead of its return to Scandinavia. Like the Spitsbergen Pink-footed Geese normally wintering in the Low Countries, this movement to the UK was possibly influenced by the snowy weather.

Red-throated Diver

1410960 1 02/08/04 Sullom Voe Terminal, Shetland x 15/05/09 Rossvik, Vigra, Giske, NORWAY, 452 km

Slavonian Grebe

FB12777 4 25/10/04 Loch Ashie, Inverness, Highland x 16/06/08 Sudur-Athingeyjar, ICELAND, 1,134 km

Kestrel

S-255019 1 04/07/07 Rovaniemi, FINLAND xL 10/09/09 St Fergus, North-east Scotland

Common Sandpiper

NW05591 4f 02/05/04 Innerleithen, Borders R 17/4/10 Delta del Llobregat, Barcelona, SPAIN
(also seen 26/4/06, 28/4/07, 31/5/08)

Greenshank

DB73793 3 09/08/09 Montrose Basin, Angus & Dundee RN 29/05/10 Sutherland
A very interesting record of a juvenile ringed on passage on the east coast retrapped nesting in northern Scotland the following summer.

Stock Dove

EW15276 1 08/07/06 Dunbar, Lothian

An interesting movement of a species we know little about. Our breeding population seems to far out number our wintering population.

R 05/07/08 Netherseal, Derbyshire, 371 km

Blackbird

7818780 5m 10/03/05 Helgoland, GERMANY

An interesting series of retraps of a continental Blackbird returning to winter at the same site in Lothian in three consecutive winters.

R 16/2/8 Nr Gifford, East Lothian, 706 km
(also 14/12/08, 3/1/09 & 30/1/10)

Lesser Redpoll

X282115 3 17/10/08 Ramsley Reservoir, Derbyshire

x 07/04/09 Aberfeldy, Perth & Kinross, 398 km



Plate 204. A Shag chick (red darvic SDL) ringed at Bullers of Buchan, North-east Scotland on 29 July 2009 © Ingmar van der Brugge. Caught in action by Ingmar fishing near IJmuiden in the Netherlands on 14 December 2009. Most young Shags winter around the UK shores with few crossing the English Channel.



Plate 205. The wing-tagged Montagu's Harrier photographed at Minsmere, Suffolk on 3 May 2010 © Jon Evans. Left wing: black 0 on yellow, right wing: black 0 on green.

Daryl Short got the surprise of his life while driving near Collieston, North-east Scotland on 22 June 2010 when he spotted a Montagu's Harrier flying over a field by the road. It was a brief view, but long enough for him to also see and note that the bird had wing tags. It had been ringed as a chick on 18 July 2008 at Villeneuve, Puy-de-Dôme, central France and had been seen earlier in spring in Norfolk and Suffolk in late April/early May before heading northwards through Cambridgeshire and also possibly through South Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

This is only the third foreign-ringed Montagu's Harrier to be found in the UK. One in Suffolk in 1928 and a more recent record of a freshly dead road casualty near Invershin, Sutherland on 7 October 2002, just 60 days after it was ringed as a chick in France.



Plate 206. A 2007 Osprey chick (white darvic SB) from the Highlands © Jacques van der Neut. Photographed less than four months later in October 2007 at its wintering quarters 4,621 km south-west in Djoudi National Park, Senegal.

Plate 207. A Common Gull metal-ringed as a chick at Loch Tarff, Highland in May 1997 © Michael Casey. Seen in January 2004 and again in September 2004 at Sligo Harbour, Eire. Some juvenile Common Gulls are sedentary, while others can travel considerable distances to wintering areas (BTO Migration Atlas).



Plate 208. This colour-ringed Rock Pipit found breeding on Whalsay, Shetland in May 2010 by John Lowrie turned out to have been ringed at New Aberdour beach in North-east Scotland on 13 February 2010. A proportion of Northern Isles Rock Pipit juveniles disperse southwards for the winter © Jason Atkinson.



May 2007. This was the first distant movement from three broods ringed and fits in with what they had hoped/expected - that the 'sedentary' Nuthatch, which has colonized Scotland recently, is expanding northwards from birds hatched in the south. A pioneering Nuthatch indeed © Richard Cooper.



Plate 209. Richard Cooper was delighted to see and photograph a Nuthatch in his garden at Meikleour near Blairgowrie, Perth & Kinross on 4 May 2010. On closer inspection of the photographs with Neil Mitchell they noticed the bird was colour-ringed. Further investigation and Clyde Ringing Group secretary Ian Livingstone was able to provide the ringing details of this bird. It had been ringed as a chick in a bat box at Dalziel, Motherwell, Clyde on 16



Plate 210. Ian Morrison and Kitty Halcrow photographed this metal-ringed Hawfinch (above) on their bird table in Stromness, Orkney on 2 April 2010 and managed to read the ring number. It had been ringed as a first-year female in Oye, Kvinesdal, Vest-Agder, Norway on 8 July 2003 - a Scandinavian old hand stopping off to refuel before the North Sea crossing. Further evidence of Scandinavian Hawfinches in Scotland... these Scandinavian birds aren't confined to Scotland though. Over 250 Hawfinches have been colour ringed by Jerry Lewis and colleagues in the Forest of Dean since 2003 and on 24 March 2010 they had their first capture of a Norwegian-ringed bird. Previously, there have only been two foreign-ringed Hawfinches found in UK: one in Shetland from Germany and one on Fair Isle from Norway © Ian Morrison and Kitty Halcrow.

Lesser Redpoll ringing in the Highlands

Towards the end of September, I normally set up mist nets close to my home in Kiltarlity, Inverness-shire in order to catch Redwings when they arrive. In 2009, whilst waiting for the Redwings to appear, I decided to attempt to catch what I initially thought was a local flock of 40–50 Lesser Redpolls which had been present for some time, feeding in nearby Silver Birches. I did this by placing a tape lure by one of the nets. I met with instant success, catching three within minutes of switching on the tape.

The 12 m net was situated in willow scrub in an open bushy area on croft land, close to stands of Rowan, Silver Birch, and Scots Pine. Many of the birds tended to enter the net by alighting near the top of a nearby 10 metre Silver Birch and gradually descending down it towards the tape.

It quickly became apparent that this flock was part of a much larger, transitory population as 588 birds were eventually caught between 5 October and 15 December. Further, an adult male caught on 11 December had a German ring, for which full details are still awaited, and throughout this period only one bird was retrapped.



Plate 211. Tape lured Lesser Redpoll, Aboyne, North-east Scotland, January 2010 © Harry Scott.

No ringing took place during a spell of severe weather which lasted from 19 December until the near to the end of January. There were still large numbers of Lesser Redpolls present, often seen feeding on Silver Birch seeds which had fallen on local roads recently cleared of snow.

Ringing resumed on 26 January 2010 and continued throughout most of February until it was again curtailed by a further period of heavy snow and very low temperatures. During this second period, a further 209 birds were caught of which only two were retraps, three and seven days respectively after ringing.

One bird ringed on 10 December was controlled in Cumbria on 18 February and another ringed on 30 November was controlled 6 km away on 7 February. A third bird ringed on 10 December was found dead on 18 February, 20 km away near Inverness.

At the end of February there seemed to be a major exodus of birds, with only a few individuals subsequently being present in the area. It was also noticed that during February, the birds were becoming less responsive to the tape lure.

633 of the 795 ringed were sexed and aged of which 74% were first-year birds.

Fairly small numbers of Lesser Redpolls have been ringed in the Highlands compared to other finches. There have been 30 recoveries of Highland birds including six showing movements to Belgium, several to southern England, mostly in April and October, and also a few movements within the Highlands.

The project was resumed in July to shed further light on their movements and also to retrap birds of known age to aid ageing and sexing which can be very difficult.

I am very grateful to Jacquie Heaton for her help with the ringing and also for being prepared to be on "standby" in the event of a large influx of birds into the net which happened on several occasions.

Malcolm Harvey, Clach Bhan, Loaneckheim, Kiltarlity, Beauly, Inverness-shire. IV4 7JQ. Tel 01463 741328

Hybrid Greenfinch x Linnet

On 14 February 2009, while trapping and ringing a flock of mixed finches (mostly Linnets, with a few Reed Buntings and Chaffinches) near Newburgh, North-east Scotland, we caught the following bird with a whoosh net. The site was baited with small weed seed, niger and oil seed rape. Initially it was thought to be a Greenfinch, however it was quickly realised that this was not the case as it had features of both Greenfinch and Linnet. Hybrids are not common occurrences in wild finches, although they are commonly produced by aviculturists.

This is the first hybrid finch ever caught by the Grampian Ringing Group who have over the years caught many thousands of finches; none of us had ever seen such a bird.

The bird was aged as adult (male) using feather wear criteria for both Greenfinch and Linnet. The bird had a wing length of 88 mm and weighed 24 g. Upon release it called as a Linnet.

*Robert Rae, 11 Millend,
Newburgh, Aberdeenshire*



Plates 212–214. Hybrid Greenfinch x Linnet, nr Newburgh, North-east Scotland, February 2009 © Robert Rae.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Jackdaws: Over 100 adult and young Jackdaws have been colour-ringed in and around Peterculter, Aberdeen this summer to investigate winter dispersal and site fidelity. They have three colours on their left leg. Please send any sightings to e.ferguson17@hotmail.co.uk



Plate 215. A colour-ringed brood of Jackdaws at Peterculter, Aberdeen © Euan Ferguson.

Hawfinches: Hawfinches have been colour-ringed at Scone Palace near Perth since 2005. Resighting them has proven to be very difficult, so any reports either at Scone or elsewhere would be gratefully received. A radio-tracking study has shown that these birds can wander quite widely and the sole ringing recovery to date was of a bird in Sweden. Because of difficulties in seeing the legs and any rings in the field, anyone taking photographs or who already has photographs, especially digitals, of the birds could examine their pictures to see if any colour rings can be seen. Please report any sightings, even partial combinations of colour rings to john.calladine@bto.org



Plate 216. A Hawfinch at Scone Palace demonstrating typical reluctance to show any colour rings © Eric McCabe.

Shags: Further to the request for sightings of colour-ringed Shags in the last Ringers' Roundup, a new BTO RAS (Retrapping Adults for Survival) project has been started in 2010 on the Shiantis by Jim Lennon, Alister Clunas and the rest of the Shiantis Seabird Ringing Group. Over 100 birds were ringed, including over 30 adults, using a red darvic ring with four white letters on the left leg. Prior to this project, most of the Shag colour-ringing has been carried out on the east coast, so now here is a great chance for birders on the west coast to help with this useful and interesting project by checking their local Shag roosts for ringed birds. Please report to: manew@ceh.ac.uk.

Photo challenge: Not the sharpest of photos, but can anybody beat three darvics together (except on the Isle of May during the breeding season!). Adult red IIB and immatures green SCZ and SZH, all from the Isle of May, photographed together by Jessica Haines at a roost at Buchanhaven, Peterhead, North-east Scotland on 27 March 2010.



Plate 217. Shags, Buchanhaven, North-east Scotland, March 2010 © Jessica Haines.



Figure 1. Moray Coast. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2010

BIRDING

- the Moray coast

M. COOK

The Moray coast, as far as I am aware, is a bit neglected by birders from elsewhere in Scotland. This is a pity because there are enough excellent sites to provide a brilliant day's birding at any time of year. There are also very few active local birders - so there is every chance of visitors coming up with something new and good. In fact this happens with embarrassing frequency!

In this brief tour I shall describe the best sites, how to get there and what you are likely to see.

1: Cullen to Portgordon (NJ510675 to NJ395643)

The rocky shore to the east of Cullen holds a few waders in winter but the best chance of interest here is during migrant fall conditions when the few willows and other scrub behind the beach have some potential. From the harbour, continue east through the buildings for a short distance, park and walk east past the pet cemetery.

Heading west out of Cullen you pass beneath the viaduct and, on your right, is a car park beside the golf course club house. At this point a sizeable burn flows into the sea, providing freshwater at the beach. This is a popular gull bathing spot and in winter it has proved good for Glaucous and Iceland Gulls.

Portknockie and the Bow Fiddle Rock can be reached by turning north from the A98 onto the A942. Soon after entering Portknockie, turn right and follow signs for Bow Fiddle Rock. In winter, the Rock, and adjacent straits and cliffs hold a huge Shag roost. If you arrive in good light you can be helpful by searching for colour rings with a 'scope. In spring and summer there is an excellent sea bird colony here. OK it's small - don't come if it's a Fowlsheugh-type spectacle you're after - but there are lots of Shags, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and gulls, and a few pairs of Razorbills have started to breed in recent years. But the speciality is Black Guillemots. If you come in April on a calm morning you can see up to 20 on the sea, but you will be very unlucky not to see some at any time in the summer.

If you follow the A942 west to Findochty you will pass a cemetery. Park near here and walk down to the cliff top. Here there are more Black Guillemots in summer, and a good chance of seeing Ravens and Stonechats.

Continue west, and the road drops down to sea level just beyond the golf course. Turn sharp right at the foot of the hill and drive a short distance to the car park beside the former Strathlene Hotel. If you walk back east from here you will have banks of gorse on your right. This has

proved to be the best spot in Moray for passerine migrants. Don't expect too much - after all, Moray is 'round the corner' from the east coast - but with the right conditions (rain, wind a touch north of east) then you may strike lucky. In recent years, Wryneck, Bluethroat, Icterine Warbler, Reed Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Black Redstart have all turned up. If nothing else, there are always Stonechats.

From here, the cliffs disappear and the rocky shore extends for 7 km westwards from Portessie to Portgordon. Continuous access is simple from the A990 and A942. In winter, the rocks hold numerous Turnstones, Redshanks and Oystercatchers. Dunlin, Ringed Plovers and Knot are more likely nearer to Portgordon, while Purple Sandpipers are best sought between Buckie harbour and Strathlene. The gull flocks are worth checking for Glaucous and Iceland, especially around Buckie harbour where the first Ross's is long overdue! The harbour is always worth a look, especially in stormy weather when birds may seek shelter, over the years it has held White-billed Diver, Red-necked Grebe and Little Auk - but Eider and Guillemot are more likely!

2: Spey Bay and Kingston (NJ350655 to NJ335657)

To reach Spey Bay village, and the mouth of the River Spey, continue west along the shore from Portgordon. The small road crosses a hump-backed bridge and heads inland. After about 2 km, turn right to Nether Dallachy and

continue on to Spey Bay. Where the road ends is a car park and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society centre - a good spot for a coffee, although it shuts in mid winter. This side gives good views of the river mouth. To reach the other side of the Spey estuary you need to head down to Fochabers to cross the Spey then, in Mosstodloch, head north up the B9015. At the point where you hit the coast the road turns sharp left and here, on the right, is another car park which gives views over the muddy part of the estuary.

Breeding species around the mouth of the Spey include Shelduck around the muddy estuary and terns which fly up and down the river from the sea. Most terns are Arctic but there are usually some Common and you might, with luck, see a Little. Sandwich Terns are often offshore. Between July and September, Ospreys fish the river mouth and wader passage, although light in terms of numbers, sometimes includes scarcer species such as Whimbrel, Greenshank, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper. A moulting flock of 100+ Goosanders frequents the river mouth. Offshore, Spey Bay holds a moulting flock of Red-throated Divers in autumn and Great Northern Divers are regular in summer plumage in spring. Sea ducks, in winter, are less numerous than formerly but good numbers of scoters, Long-tailed Ducks and Eiders can still sometimes be seen - these can be found anywhere in the Bay between Lossiemouth and the mouth of the Spey.



Plate 218. Speymouth, June 2009 © Martin Cook.



Plate 219. *Lossie Estuary, January 2006* © Martin Cook.

3: Lossie Forest (NJ320660 to NJ250695)

Entry to the forest (on foot) can be gained from the east (from Kingston), the south (from Speyslaw - you can drive up the sandy track and park at NJ285669) or the west (leave the B9103 at Inchbroom across the narrow bridge over the ditch and proceed into the forest where there is a car park). As well as providing the easiest access, the west end of the forest provides the best birding. Follow the main track north from the car park towards the sea and Crested Tits are there to be found. It helps a lot if you know the call. You've a good chance of Scottish Crossbill too - most likely flying over, calling. If you continue north as far as the sea then you have reached a good spot for watching divers. As at Kingston, autumn is best for Red-throated, and in spring there have been up to 47 Great Northern Divers, including summer-plumaged adults, between here and Kingston.

4: Lossiemouth (NJ240700)

Lossiemouth is most easily reached from the main A96, turning north up the B9103 about 2 km west of Lhanbryde. On the east side of the town, the River Lossie flows out to the sea at the East Beach through an estuary in which sand and mud are exposed at low tide. Due to the small size of the estuary, and ease of vehicle access, shorebirds are easily viewed. Commoner waders are always present and in winter there are often some Sanderling. During autumn passage Whimbrel, Greenshank, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper may drop in. Gulls

are abundant at all seasons, especially in autumn and winter when there is a good chance of Glaucous or Iceland. Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gulls have also been found here. The East Beach dunes hold a flock of Snow Buntings in winter. There is a rocky shore between the West Beach and the harbour - worth looking here for Purple Sandpiper, Golden Plover and Sanderling in winter. The headland just west of the harbour provides the area's best vantage point for sea-watching when conditions are favourable, notably north or north-easterly gales in autumn, and skuas and shearwaters pass quite close offshore.



Plate 220. *Covesea, May 2008* © Martin Cook.

5: Covesea Cliffs (NJ176708 to NJ160702)

Here are 3 km of sandstone cliffs with extensive gorse on the cliff tops. Access can be gained from the Clashach Quarry road, east of Hopeman (park at NJ158698), or from the gated road leading to the coastguard lookout at Covesea (limited parking at NJ179702). The seabird colonies here contain Fulmars, Kittiwakes and Herring Gulls with a few pairs of Shags and Great Black-backed Gulls. Viewing the seabird colonies from the cliff top is not easy and they are best seen from the beach below at low tide. Great care is needed, however, because on a rising tide access back to the cliff top path is not easy. The gorse often houses 1–2 pairs of Stonechats and there is a small Sand Martin colony in the quarry.

7: Burghead Bay and Roseisle Forest (NJ107690–NJ040649)

Burghead Bay is a wide, shallow bay extending for 8 km between Burghead and Findhorn. The best viewing points are from the dunes at Findhorn or the Forestry Commission picnic area in Roseisle Forest (access from the B9089 c. 1 km west of the malting - at NJ114647). Divers of all three commoner species can be seen in autumn and winter as well as Slavonian and, sometimes, Red-necked Grebes. Hundreds of Long-tailed Ducks and scoters are usually offshore in winter and careful scrutiny of the flocks will often reveal at least one Surf Scoter. Roseisle Forest is best accessed from the FC picnic area but you can also walk in from Burghead. Crested Tit and Scottish Crossbill are possible here.

8: Culbin Forest and Culbin Bar (NJ030647–NH950613)

Formerly a wide expanse of sand dunes and shingle ridges, the area has been transformed by extensive pine plantations. The forest is best entered from the Forestry Commission car parks at Cloddymoss (NH981599) or Wellhill (NJ997614), north-west from Forres. Continue west from Forres along the A96 until the road crosses the River Findhorn. Turn right immediately onto the minor roads which give access to Cloddymoss and Wellhill. In the forest listen for Crested Tits that are quite numerous and most easily located by call. Also present are Siskins,



Plate 221. Burghead Bay, January 2006 © Martin Cook.

6: Burghead (NJ110693)

Follow the coast road west from Hopeman. On entering Burghead, turn right just beyond the hideous maltings, and this small street takes you down to the shore. The stretch of shore between here and the headland is good for rocky shore waders, and Eiders and other sea duck can often be seen in small numbers. This site has produced some good rarities in recent years - White-billed Diver, King Eider and, most famously, Grey-tailed Tattler. When seabirds are moving offshore, the headland provides a good vantage point. The harbour is always worth checking as sea duck and divers sometimes shelter there.



Plate 222. Culbin Bar, September 2006 © Martin Cook.



Plate 223. Findhorn Bay, September 2006 © Martin Cook.

crossbills (apparently Parrot as well as Scottish); Stonechats and, in summer, a few Tree Pipits and, occasionally, Redstarts.

Access to the Bars is through the forest on foot or bike - Cloddymoss car park is nearer than Wellhill. If you want to cross onto the western bar then aim for the salt marsh at NJ945612. There is a maze of creeks to negotiate but you can find a way across without too much difficulty. Culbin Bars are sandy, vegetated with Marram and other low-growing grasses and herbs, and some regenerating trees. Between the bars and the forest is extensive coastal marsh with mud and sand flats exposed at low tide. In summer there are breeding Shelduck and Eider, but the wader flocks and offshore seaduck provide the interest between autumn and spring. Oystercatcher, Knot, Dunlin, Redshank and Bar-tailed Godwit are the main species but this is also the best site in the area for Sanderling and Grey Plovers.

9: Findhorn Bay (NJ040630)

Situated at the mouth of the River Findhorn, the bay empties almost completely at low tide to leave wide expanses of mud and sand. Access to the east side is straightforward from the B9011 between Kinloss and Findhorn villages. Along the south side, head for Netherton Farm and c400m beyond here (at NJ036615) a short rough track leads to the edge of the bay. A short walk east from this point takes you to a shallow pool in fields behind the sea wall - this is well worth a look in late summer and autumn, especially when

a high tide pushes waders off the bay itself. The third alternative for access is up the west side. Cross the River Findhorn on the A96 and turn sharp right. Head up the small roads to Wellside Farm, beyond which you can park and walk up the (private) track towards Binsness. This brings you out beside the Muckle Burn and its associated creeks - which are particularly good for Greenshank in July and August.

When visiting the bay it is best to arrive on a rising tide when the (otherwise distant) birds are pushed towards you. The spring and autumn wader passage seasons are most rewarding here with an annual scatter of scarcer species such as Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Ruff and Spotted Redshank. Several rarities have occurred in recent years including Baird's Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs and Wilson's Phalarope. Ospreys regularly fish the shallows between April and late September. In winter there is often a large goose roost, but shooting is a serious problem for birds and birders alike. Other numerous wildfowl are Teal, Mallard and Wigeon; Pintail are quite often present in small numbers. The surrounding salt marsh often hosts a small flock of Twite and there is a chance of Hen Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine or Short-eared Owl.

*Martin Cook, Rowanbrae, Clochan,
Buckie, Banffshire AB56 5EQ
E-mail: martin.cook99@btinternet.com*

The pioneers of Scottish ornithology

W.R.P. BOURNE

Repeated references in the records of the original Scottish Parliament (Gladstone 1926) show that Scots have long been interested in birds for sport, food and pest control, but general knowledge about them was neither comprehensive nor accurate (Sibbald 1684). Then, following the outbreak of peace and (urban) prosperity in the middle of the 18th century, the remarkable flowering of talent known as the Scottish Enlightenment (Herman 2001) included the only Scottish ornithologists of truly international stature, omitted from the latest *Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) due to lack of space on the grounds that it was primarily about 'birds and not birders'. Thus, for example, when Audubon found it necessary to publish his *Birds of America* (1827–38) in Europe, he initially chose Edinburgh (Chalmers 2003, Hart-Davis 2003). They deserve more attention.

According to foremost Scottish ornithological historian, the late Ian Pennie (1966), the first real Scottish ornithologist was William Ogilvie (1736–1819; Ritchie 2004), who taught at King's College, Aberdeen, where there was one of the first museums, from 1761, but little seems to be recorded about him. In 1804 Robert Jameson (1772–1854), who had studied with the geologist A.G. Werner at Freiburg, became Regius Professor of Natural History in Edinburgh, and founded a Scottish version of the Linnaean Society of London, the Wernerian Natural History Society, which organised lectures and published eight volumes of *Memoirs* from 1811 to 1838. Charles Darwin (1958) when a medical student in Edinburgh for a couple of years before preferring to study for the Church at Cambridge (sic) found that while Edinburgh University lectures were dreadful, the company was congenial. Jameson was followed as professor in 1845 by John Fleming (1785–1857) from Aberdeen, who had published a *History of British Animals* with a

104-page list of birds in 1828, and become a general consultant on natural affairs.

The first major ornithologist was a William MacGillivray (1796–1852), born in Aberdeen, reared in the Outer Hebrides, and educated in Aberdeen (Ralph 1999). He became Jameson's assistant in Edinburgh, then Conservator of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, and finally (in 1841) Regius Professor of Natural History in Aberdeen. Darwin (1958) thought 'he had not much the appearance and manners of a gentleman', but was very kind, and 'they had much interesting natural history talk'. MacGillivray assisted Audubon with the text of his (American) *Ornithological Biography* (1831–39) accompanying his pictures, and then wrote his own five-volume *History of British Birds* (1837–52). Unfortunately owing to his novel classification, strange Americanised names, much description including anatomy,



Plate 224. William MacGillivray (1796–1852)
© University of Aberdeen.

and inability to include his own fine coloured illustrations (some now on the Natural History Museum website), it was eclipsed by more popular works. His account of an exploration of Deeside had to be published posthumously by the Royal Family (MacGillivray 1855).

Meanwhile hunting and collecting were also becoming popular with amateurs as they became increasingly affluent and communications and guns were improved. This was promoted by Sir William Jardine (1800–74), a landowner in Annandale, who had also attended Jameson's lecture in Edinburgh (Jackson & Davis 2001). He formed a large and varied collection, describing many new species, and conducted a worldwide correspondence. He joined a friend from beyond the Tweed, John Prideaux Selby (1788–1867; Jackson 1992) in exploring the natural history of Sutherland with a wheeled boat (Selby 1834), and in producing large, expensive bird pictures with the Edinburgh engraver and publisher William Home Lizars (1788–1859), later also employed by Audubon, and then a 40-volume *Naturalists' Library* including four volumes on the *Birds of Great Britain and Ireland*. These activities, and those by individuals such as Charles St. John (1809–56; St. John 1846) based on fieldwork around the 1830s, but often only published later, were the glory of Scottish ornithology; nobody else but MacGillivray exchanged notes with Darwin or described what it was like to spend a day in the field in Scotland with John James Audubon (and his gun). Between them MacGillivray produced the first large bird handbook and Jardine the first popular bird guide (its hand-coloured illustrations are still in demand). Subsequent distinguished 'pioneers' built without much acknowledgement on these foundations.

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Bill Bourne, Dufftown
E-mail: wrpbourne@yahoo.co.uk



Plates 225–227. First-summer male presumed 'Channel Wagtail' (*M. f. flava* x *M. f. flavissima*), Fair Isle, May 2006 © Paul Baxter. Although ageing of spring wagtails can be difficult, this bird can be confidently aged as a first-summer bird due to the presence of three generations of greater coverts, and thus two moult limits.

'Channel' and Sykes's Wagtails in Scotland: a review of identification criteria and status

P.A.A. BAXTER

The name 'Channel Wagtail' has recently been adopted for birds which show features intermediate between nominate Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava* (hereafter *flava*), the taxon which breeds in continental Europe, and 'British' Yellow Wagtail *M. f. flavissima* (hereafter *flavissima*), the taxon most familiar to British observers. These birds are believed to be intergrades originating from a zone of hybridisation between *flava* and *flavissima* in northern France. Awareness of this intergradation and of the appearance of these birds has resulted in presumed 'Channel Wagtails' being recorded with increasing regularity in the UK. This article discusses the occurrence of one such bird in Scotland (Fair Isle, May 2006) and reviews the identification and status of Sykes's Wagtail *M. f. beema* (hereafter *beema*), the most likely source of confusion.

A presumed 'Channel Wagtail' on Fair Isle in 2006

A bird identified by the finder as a male Blue-headed Wagtail *M. f. flava* was discovered in The Havens on Fair Isle on 6 May 2006. Opportunities to see any Yellow Wagtails in Scotland are limited, so, being a resident on the island, I took the opportunity and headed to The Havens. I enjoyed fantastic views in the early evening sunshine of a beautiful bird, feeding amongst the seaweed on the south beach in The Havens. It was, and still is, the best looking *flava* wagtail I have ever seen. However, it didn't match my experience and expectations of a typical *flava*.

My main concerns were centred on the head colouration and pattern. I considered the supercilium to be broader and more flared than

flava. It had a supercilium that was quite narrow and of equal width between the bill base and eye, but which flared quite dramatically beyond the eye, regardless of the bird's posture or direction. This can be seen well in the accompanying plates (Plates 225–227) and appears similar to the individual photographed in Lincolnshire (Plate 231). This pattern is rather different to the typical supercilium shown by *flava*, which appears long, narrow and of equal width, and tends to stand out more because of the darker, ashy-grey colouration of the forehead, crown, nape and ear coverts. The head colouration of the Fair Isle bird was a beautiful 'powder' blue, much paler than I would associate with *flava*. There were no green feathers mixed within the blue of the nape or crown; such an admixture is a feature of hybrid individuals. The lower ear coverts and subocular area showed a substantial white 'hollow'. The throat was also white, which is atypical, but not unknown, for *flava*. Unfortunately, no call

was given by the bird during my observations. I began to consider other possibilities, chiefly *beema*, as 'Channel Wagtail' was, to me at least, still relatively unknown.

To help discuss the identification of the Fair Isle bird, it is necessary to appreciate the distribution, taxonomic status and identification of a number of forms. The discussion which follows deals only with males, as these are generally the easiest to identify and because the Fair Isle bird was a male.

Range and distribution of Yellow Wagtail taxa

Flavissima is a familiar summer visitor to the UK, but with only 25–35 pairs breeding in Scotland, the majority of which are in Lothian and Borders (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Outwith the UK, *flavissima* breeds in southern Norway, and in coastal France, Belgium and Holland. The wintering grounds lie in West Africa.



Plate 228. 'British' Yellow Wagtail (*M. f. flavissima*), Oxfordshire, April 2009 © Stephen Burch. *Flavissima* is the race of Yellow Wagtail most familiar to the majority of British birders - however, it can be outnumbered by *flava* in the north of Scotland. The identification of males is straightforward, with their distinct yellow and green head pattern.



Plate 229. Blue-headed Wagtail (*M. f. flava*), Israel, April 2007 © Terje Kolaas/ www.naturspesialisten.no. In this classic individual, note the hue of the ashy-grey head and ear coverts, the latter of which has a typically small sub-ocular patch (the pale area immediately under the eye). The supercilium is narrow and its length is fairly typical of this subspecies. The ear coverts of male *flava* are often concolourous with the crown but can sometimes be very slightly darker. This individual's white chin and yellow throat are classic *flava* features. However, birds at the pale end of variation in *flava* can be extremely similar to *beema*, and indeed, may not be reliably indentified. Alström et al. (2003) cautioned that in collections where they have examined *beema*, 25% cannot safely exclude *flava* and that studies of *beema* on its breeding grounds in Kazakhstan, indicated that many males appear very similar to *flava*.

Flava is the most widespread of the Yellow Wagtail subspecies in western and central Europe, generally breeding east to the Ukraine and north to Sweden, and covering much of continental Europe, with the exception of Spain and Italy (where it is replaced by *iberiae* and *cinereocapilla* respectively). In Scotland, it is a regular spring and autumn migrant, although numbers vary from year to year (minimum three, maximum 44; Forrester *et al.* 2007), depending on the weather conditions prevalent during the migrations periods. It has bred on a least three occasions. It winters throughout sub-Saharan Africa, following passage through southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

Where the breeding range of *flava* and *flavissima* overlap on the French side of the

English Channel, studies have shown that many birds show characters intermediate between the two taxa, with these hybrids frequently resembling *beema* (Dubois 2007). This taxon breeds in the Volga steppes in Central Asia and winters in East Africa and India, with passage through the Middle East. To further complicate matters, *flava* is considered likely to breed with *beema* where their breeding ranges overlap in western Asia (Alström *et al.* 2003).

Beema breeds in the Volga steppes in Central Asia and winters in East Africa and India. It is now thought that most birds reported in Britain resembling *beema* are variants of *flava* or intergrades (Kehoe 2006).

Sykes's Wagtail *M. f. beema* identification

Typical *beema* features are a more bluish-grey head, long, bold and rather even width white supercilium and all yellow throat and chin. The ear coverts of this taxon show extensive white, such that the whole lower half of them are white and only a broad bluish-grey eye-stripe remains. Such features can be matched to varying degrees by 'Channel Wagtail' and any such bird in a vagrant context should be listened to just as carefully as the plumage studied. Dubois (2007) states that *beema* frequently utters a thinner, sharper 'psseeeh' which recalls a distant Red-throated Pipit, although he urges caution that this may be possibly only an alarm call. In discussions with Magnus Robb, he states that, frustratingly, *beema* calls in Kazakhstan are exactly like *flava*, and that he can detect no difference (Magnus Robb pers. comm.). However, Alström *et al.* (2003) state that the calls of *beema* are mostly similar to those of *flava*, but that 'harsher' calls with a marked 'r' sound can also be given by *beema*, and this can be confused with Citrine Wagtail.

'Channel Wagtail' identification

The identification of 'Channel Wagtail' is complicated because, depending on

parentage, there can be considerable variation in plumage patterns. The situation in France has been well-studied and four distinct areas of intergradation, resulting from zones of overlap between geographically adjacent taxa, have been described. Other studies on hybrid populations have also taken place in Switzerland (Schweizer 2005).

'Channel Wagtails' (i.e. the offspring from *flava* x *flavissima*) can resemble Spanish Wagtail (*iberiae*), White-headed Wagtail (*leucocephala*), and Green-headed Wagtails (*taivana*), but most are closest to *flava* in appearance (Dubois 2007). They can, however, bear a striking similarity to *beema* and many may be inseparable. Dubois (2007) states that typical individuals show a pale grey head (paler than *flava*) and a large white supercilium (often broader and longer than in *flava*), and can occasionally show green-yellow feathers on the crown, supercilium and ear coverts (although pure *flava* can show such feathers in early spring). The amount of white on the throat is variable. The individual in Plate 231 shows clearly a much paler head than *flava*, appearing almost lavender in this image.



Plate 230. Sykes's Wagtail (*M. f. beema*), Almaty, Kazakhstan, June 2003 © Aurélien Audevard. Sykes's Wagtail (*M. f. beema*) breeds in the Volga steppes in Central Asia and winters in East Africa and India. It is now thought that most birds reported in Britain resembling *beema* represent pale variation in *flava* or intergrades.



Plate 231. Presumed male 'Channel Wagtail' (*M. f. flava* x *M. f. flavissima*), Lincolnshire, April 2009 © Nick Clayton. Whatever its status or genetic makeup, a male 'Channel Wagtail' is a truly stunning looking bird. 'Channel Wagtail' can bear a striking and often almost inseparable similarity to Sykes's Wagtail. Dubois (2007) suggested that most, if not all, birds resembling *beema* in Britain are probably a result of intergradations between *flava* and *flavissima*. It could also be argued that birds in Britain resembling *beema* may also be hybrids from the overlap zone between *flava* and *beema*.

The supercilium is broad and very flared behind the eye, lacking the well defined and narrow supercilium shown by both *flava* and *beema*. The white sub-ocular patch is distinctly more extensive in size and solid white, which extends well towards the rear of the ear coverts.

The history of Sykes's Wagtail *M. f. beema* in the UK and Scotland

The inclusion of *beema* on the British List was based on five records that pre-dated BBRC, including a bird on Fair Isle in 1910. However, these records had never been formally accepted. The status and the position of *beema* on the British List was recently reviewed by BOURC in October 2009 and the identification of these individuals was considered unacceptable or inconclusive; consequently, *beema* was removed from the British List (BOU 2010).

Prior to this review, the 1910 Fair Isle bird was the sole Scottish record of *beema* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). It was shot by William Eagle Clarke on 18 May 1910, and was originally thought to be a pale example of *flava*. Eagle Clarke positively

identified the specimen three years later, when comparisons were made with specimens held in the Natural History Museum at Tring (Clarke 1913). The identification was later commented on by Ken Williamson, the then warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory, who considered it 'undoubtedly *beema*' (Williamson 1955). The specimen is currently held in the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) (specimen number 1910.161.43, Plates 232–234).

On a visit to the NMS in June 2010, I examined the specimen and compared it with skins of several apparent *beema* (based on range and identification features) held in the same collection. The *beema* skins were taken from India and Kenya, both being wintering and passage areas for this taxon. Comparisons were made with specimens of *flava* from northern and central Europe. The 1910 Fair Isle bird showed an exact match with the *beema* specimens, in terms of head pattern and colouration. It showed no clear features suggestive of hybridisation, through the possibility of a *beema* x *flava* intergrade from the area of overlap cannot be discounted.

Unfortunately, there were no specimens from within the breeding range of *beema* in the NMS collection, so the provenance of the birds against which the 1910 Fair Isle bird was compared is not 100% certain. Incidentally, one of the other five previously accepted *beema* specimens, obtained in Sussex on 20 April 1939, is also held at the NMS (specimen number 1952.19.430). This is the palest headed individual in the collection, and shows clear hybrid features, including green feathers in the rear crown and a very pale head.

In Scotland, there is limited information on the past occurrence and breeding history of *flava* type birds. Forrester *et al.* (2007) state that 'a very small number (1–3) of *flava*-like birds can be found alongside pure *flavissima* pairs', and that 'closer examination of these birds revealed some characteristics that resembled *beema*'. They fail to state when and where these breeding attempts occurred so the precise status of these birds is uncertain, although if birds resembling *beema* were present, they must have been returning offspring from a previous mixed pair as the identification traits of summer plumage would not have been visible until their first pre-breeding moult during the spring of their second calendar year. Additionally, Forrester *et al.* (2007) give several instances of mixed breeding between *flava* and *flavissima* (from Fife in 1981, North-east Scotland in 1981 and (possibly) Upper Forth in 1976).

Discussion

Several authors (e.g. Svensson 1992, Alström *et al.* 2003, Dubois 2007) have warned of the difficulties in the identification of *beema*. There are a number of issues which need to be considered when identifying any individual, out-of-range *flava* wagtail and these apply to candidate *beema*. The first is that there is individual variation; in *flavissima*, for example, the head and upperpart colours can vary markedly, while in *flava* there is variability in the throat and chin colour. Secondly, birds from within the core range of a particular taxa can occasionally show features of other taxa; Dubois (2007) refers to such birds as 'variants'. Thirdly, partial leucism or albinism can occur and lead to birds with distinctly pale heads (e.g. Dubois 2007, Plate 8). A fourth issue is that hybrid-



Plate 232. Yellow Wagtail, subspecies unknown, obtained Fair Isle, Shetland, 18 May 1910, now held in National Museum Scotland, Edinburgh © Paul Baxter. Until recently, this was the sole Scottish record of Sykes's Wagtail *M. f. beema*. Note the steely blue-grey head, long narrow supercilium and extensive white sub-ocular stripe.



Plate 233. Comparison of male Yellow Wagtail specimens, National Museum Scotland, Edinburgh © Paul Baxter. The Fair Isle 1910 specimen (second from bottom), in comparison with *flava* specimens from Czech Republic and Fair Isle (upper two) and India (bottom). The upper two specimens were labelled as *flava*, and show noticeably darker heads, striking supercilia and lack any sub-ocular stripe. The 1910 Fair Isle specimen is identical to that from Jelallabad Shir, India, obtained in March 1872, which is within the wintering range of *beema*.



Plate 234. Comparison of male Yellow Wagtail specimens, National Museum Scotland, Edinburgh © Paul Baxter. From left to right - *beema* (India), *flava* (Czech Republic), *flava* (Shetland), *beema* (India), Fair Isle 1910, Sussex 1939. The right-hand two birds were, until recently, on the British List as Sykes's Wagtail.

sation between taxa, especially when multiple generation hybrids are involved, can lead to birds which show any combination of features. Therefore, despite recent improvements in our knowledge of Yellow Wagtail taxa, we still cannot be confident that a bird showing a 'perfect' suite of characters for a particular subspecies is a pure example of that subspecies. Finally, it should be noted that differences in *beema* and *flava* may be merely clinal and so it may be better to synonymise the two (Alström *et al.* 2003). Call has been suggested as differing between *beema* and other taxa (Dubois 2007), but Alström *et al.* (2003) rather contradict this assertion. Thus, it would appear that there are no diagnostic identification features to help separate of an out of range *beema* from a 'Channel Wagtail'.

Although the 1910 Fair Isle bird does resemble *beema*, recent evidence indicates that it is impossible to rule out a bird of hybrid origin. Indeed, it may not be possible to identify any suspected vagrant, out-of-range individuals with confidence. Clearly, while any future claims of *beema* in the UK will have to exclude a bird of hybrid origin; this may simply not be possible, at least based on current knowledge. Thus, it may be wiser to err on the side of caution and label any bird as 'showing the characteristics closest to ...' It would seem that the only possible way to reinstate *beema* to the Scottish List would be the discovery of a ringed individual from within the breeding range, and which shows all the features associated with *beema*. Any birds showing features of *beema* should be fully documented and formally submitted to the rarities committee to be held on file so that any future reviews can be undertaken. Particular attention should be made to any calls given by the subject bird.

Though at the time its appearance was puzzling, it is now clear that the 2006 Fair Isle bird closely resembles a 'Channel Wagtail'. From a Scottish context, it would be worthwhile documenting any future individuals that show features of 'Channel Wagtail' to develop our understanding of this fascinating and complex subject. Such documentation should ideally contain a selection of images and describe, in detail, any calls given by the bird.

Acknowledgements

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Paul Baxter, 2 Woodend Cottage, Trustach,
Banchory, Aberdeenshire AB31 4AY.
E-mail: paul@abvalve.co.uk



Plate 235. Wood Duck, Brow Loch, Mainland, Shetland, April 2009 © Jim Nicolson.

Wood Duck, Shetland, April–June 2009

R. FRAY

The afternoon of 16 April 2009 saw me checking various lochs in south Mainland Shetland for dead wildfowl (as part of my job with the RSPB, not some perverse obsession). My last port of call was Brow Loch; here I idly started scanning a flock of Tufted Ducks when I noticed (through bins) something that looked a bit like a Wood Duck on the edge of the flock. Checking through a telescope confirmed that it was indeed a drake Wood Duck. Completely underwhelmed, I carried on counting the Tufted Ducks, but something nagged at me to look at it again. It seemed to have two wings, both of which looked intact. I decided I ought to let somebody know, just in case, and alerted other local birders via our text messaging grapevine,

thoroughly expecting a volley of abusive texts back telling me to stop wasting everybody's time. However, it seemed that others had more confidence in it than me, and within an hour or so most of Shetland's birders had turned out to see it. We then tried the standard 'dodgy duck' test. A few of us walked the couple of hundred yards towards the edge of the loch to see what the Wood Duck would do: would it come quacking across the grass asking for a loaf of bread and a lift home? Rather pleasingly it didn't; as soon as it saw us approaching, it swam away quickly and then took to flight, displaying a fine pair of wings and two unringed legs. It seemed in good condition and showed no signs of having been previously held in captivity.

It remained at Brow Loch intermittently until 3 May, and then visited Loch of Spiggie on 14–27 May. After another apparent absence, it reappeared at Loch of Hillwell on 4–20 June. During this time it provoked a fair bit of interest, and a number of birders from outwith Shetland travelled to see it. At no time did it give any obvious impression of originating from captivity, although later in its stay some observers noted that it didn't always take to flight on approach, preferring to swim away. Whilst at Brow Loch, it frequently consorted with Tufted Ducks, where it fed on the edge of the flock and appeared to be taking advantage of areas of water disturbed by the repeated diving of the Tufted Ducks. At Spiggie and Hillwell it generally kept its own company.

So, what to make of this bird? Personally, I'm not a great fan of pretty wildfowl, and despite the seemingly good reception this bird received from some quarters, I will take a lot of convincing that it was a genuine vagrant. Wood Ducks are common in captivity (although there are none currently known in Shetland) and feral birds are at large in several parts of Britain. Breeding has been recorded in Berkshire, Devon, Kent and Wiltshire, and possibly in

Cheshire and Lincolnshire. The Shetland bird's extended stay did it no favours, and the appearance of a Ruddy Shelduck at Spiggie around the same time didn't help matters! Unfortunately the Wood Duck appeared a couple of weeks ahead of an exceptional arrival of transatlantic vagrants to Shetland in early May, which included Brown-headed Cowbird, Solitary Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Franklin's Gull, Pectoral Sandpiper, Lesser Scaup and two Black Ducks; had the Wood Duck arrived at the same time this surely would have helped its case. On the plus side, the bird's rather wary nature, along with its unringed legs, intact wings and immaculate plumage, are good points, and the time of year (when wildfowl are moving north) is potentially promising.

There have been two previous Shetland records, both of which have a case to be taken more seriously than the majority of Wood Ducks recorded in Britain. Both involved males that were shot: at Sae Water, near Voe on 30 October 1977 and Fair Isle on 27 November 1979. The specimen of the 1977 individual was not preserved, but the stomach contents of the Fair Isle bird were sent for analysis to try and



Plate 236. Wood Duck, Brow Loch, Mainland, Shetland, April 2009 © Jim Nicolson.



Plate 237. *Wood Duck, Brow Loch, Mainland, Shetland, April 2009* © George Petrie.

establish the bird's origins; unfortunately this was not carried out as the sample went missing.

Wood Duck is not currently on the British List, except in Category E (which is reserved for escapes). There is an argument for putting some records in Category D (the 'holding' category for potential vagrants), and the fact that Wood Duck is one of most numerous ducks breeding on the eastern seaboard of North America, with northern populations wintering as far south as Mexico, means that vagrancy to Britain is a genuine possibility (if it hasn't already happened). However, an upgrade to Category A seems only a remote possibility unless a bird ringed in North America is found in Britain. Elsewhere in the Western Palearctic, there have been at least nine accepted records of Wood Duck from the Azores since 1963, including a bird ringed in North America; all records from here have occurred between September and February. However, as the Azores are about 1,900 miles from Shetland (and Newfoundland is 'only' about 2,100 miles from Shetland), the records from here are probably of little relevance. Perhaps more pertinently, there have been five accepted records of Wood Duck from Iceland, four of which occurred between mid April and early May.

As I've mentioned, I personally find it highly unlikely that this bird will pass the BOU test; however, I have never found a first for Britain before so if it does for some strange reason make it on to Category A then I will be delighted!

Rob Fray, Shetland



Plate 238. *Wood Duck, Brow Loch, Mainland, Shetland, April 2009* © Gary Bell.



Plate 239. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, June 2009 © Robert Brookes.

Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, 1–11 June 2009

M.G. PENNINGTON

The publication of the *Sylvia* guide in 2001 (Shirihai *et al.* 2001) proposed a number of potential splits, so birders may have initially missed the resurrection of what seemed like an obscure subspecies of Subalpine Warbler. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans moltonii* has, however, turned out to be the most distinct taxon in the Subalpine Warbler group, and is already treated as a distinct species by some authorities.

The race *moltonii* was described by Orlando in 1937, based on birds collected in Sardinia, and named in honour of Professor Dr Edgardo Moltoni (1896–1980), one of the fathers of Italian ornithology. It was then largely ignored for over 50 years, and authorities usually synonymised it with nominate *cantillans* (Vaurie 1959, Williamson 1968, Cramp 1992, Svensson 1992). When it was first described, it was believed that *moltonii* was restricted to Corsica, Sardinia and Mallorca. Recently, it has been

discovered that this subspecies is also found in central and northern Italy, roughly between Turin and Rome (Festari *et al.* 2002, Brambilla *et al.* 2006). Recent work also strongly suggests that Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler should be ranked as a distinct species (Brambilla *et al.* 2008a, b & c). It is a sister taxon to the rest of the Subalpine group, and it is currently treated as a species in the Netherlands and Italy.

Within weeks of the *Sylvia* guide appearing in 2001, the vagrancy potential of the race was confirmed, with a male photographed and sound-recorded at Heist, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium, on 20–21 May 2001 (de Smet 2001). Subsequently, a record of a male in song at Kennemerduinen, Bloemendaal, Noord-Holland, the Netherlands, on 23–26 May 1987 has been accepted on the basis of 'descriptions of both call and song [which] were very convincing' (van der Vliet *et al.* 2002).

It has been predicted that Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler was occurring in Britain, but claims have suffered from a lack of proper documentation, especially recordings of the diagnostic call (Gantlett 2001, Golley 2007).

On Monday 1 June 2009, a smart male Subalpine Warbler was found by Rob Brookes at Skaw, one of the main migrant sites on Unst in Shetland. As the species was one of my bogey birds, which I had only added to my Unst list the previous year, I went up to see it in the evening. It was moving around quite actively the fences in the area but, as the local crofters were gathering their sheep, I spent most of my time trying to keep out of their way, and I was not able to study it closely.

Over the next week the bird was observed to set up a territory around a patch of spearmint and nettles beside a burn. It sang regularly and was noted carrying nest material: male Subalpine Warblers are known to construct so-called 'cock' nests, which are not used for subsequent egg-laying by a mated pair.

I next managed to see the bird on Saturday 6 June. Rob Brookes was already present and managing to get photographs of the bird, which was performing well and in warm and sunny conditions. It sang regularly, but to my surprise it gave a call that was diagnostic of Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler - a rolled "trrrt". From then I paid more attention to its vocalisations, though subsequently it did not give the call on its own again but did start the song with a short "trrrt". However, by then it was early afternoon and the bird had become less vocal.

I spent that evening researching and realised that it was clear that the bird warranted a further visit the next day, only this time I was equipped with my video camera. This time I noted that while it still tended to call before singing it also gave separate calls without subsequent song. By now I had become convinced the bird was indeed a Moltoni's and I managed to obtain some decent video footage which contained recordings of both the song and the call. I went back home and e-mailed a clip and my thoughts on the bird to several other birders.



Plate 240. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, June 2009 © Robert Brookes.



Plate 241. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, June 2009 © Robert Brookes.

The comments received were all positive, and both Paul Harvey and Brian Small were able to confirm that the call was an exact match from their own field experience of Moltoni's, while Brian also provided a link to a sound recording from Italy which proved reassuringly familiar.

Over subsequent days a slow procession of people travelled to see the bird, and the collective experience was that the bird often gave the call separately, and not just as a lead into the song. The bird had now become more elusive and was last seen on 11 June.

Voice

The call of Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler is a diagnostic short trill. This has been variously compared to the call of Wren, a shorter version of the call of Spectacled Warbler, a harder version of the call of Long-tailed Tit or the call of Taiga Flycatcher. All of these comparisons seemed valid to me and matched the Unst bird exactly.

The call is quite unlike the contact call of Western Subalpine Warblers, which give a "tek" reminiscent of Lesser Whitethroat, or the call of Eastern Subalpine Warbler, which gives a slightly rolled and often repeated but still quite different "trec". (A potential confusion is the alarm call of Western Subalpine Warbler, said to be given near the nest, and said to be a rolled call, but there is a recording of the alarm call of *cantillans* included on *BWPi* (Cramp 2006) and it is quite distinct, a series of distinct notes, and not a short trill.)

The song of the Unst bird was similar to that of other races of Subalpine Warbler, but with some differences which may be more apparent to those more familiar with the song. While obviously a *Sylvia* warbler song, I perceived it to have two main parts: a jangly phase, somewhat reminiscent of a Dunnock, and a harsher part, which almost recalled a Serin's song. The Unst bird's song frequently began with the characteristic call, a habit noted for Moltoni's Subalpine Warblers singing in their normal breeding range (B. Small, pers. comm).

Most importantly, the song and call should be listened to, rather than described in words, and I am aware of four recordings of the Unst bird: my own video from which sound has been extracted; a recording by Hugh Harrop and Dougie Preston from which sonagrams have been produced and published (Pennington 2009); and a recording by Paul Harvey which is on cassette tape, but has not been digitised.

Audio files can be accessed here:

<http://www.nature-shetland.co.uk/nature-latest/pics09/moltoniMGP.mp3>
<http://www.birdingworld.co.uk/StopPress1.htm>
[http://www.nature-shetland.co.uk/nature-latest/pics09/Moltonii's Subalpine \(short version of calls & subsong\).wav.aif](http://www.nature-shetland.co.uk/nature-latest/pics09/Moltonii's%20Subalpine%20(short%20version%20of%20calls%20&%20subsong).wav.aif)

And video is here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdKzntO-wwxw>

Plumage

As discussed in Pennington (2009), the differences in plumage tones between the various forms of Subalpine Warbler are slight and subject to the vagaries of light, camera technology, personal perception and vocabulary. Nevertheless, some observers are confident enough of the plumage differences to have suggested that the Unst bird was Moltoni's just by viewing the photos on the internet (although I was unaware of this when I identified the bird). The following summarises the main plumage features and the significance as I understand it at the moment. **Underparts** In most viewing conditions, the colour of the underparts was a pure, pastel or dusty-pink (in my definitions of these colours!). Several

observers, and indeed several of the photos, show a variable amount of orangey tones in the pink, but this is not as much as I would expect for Western Subalpine Warbler. The colour is quite distinct from the more purple tones of Eastern Subalpine Warbler, to my eyes, and the pink was more extensive than would be expected for this race. The extent of the pink seemed to vary - on some photos it looks as though only the throat and breast have strong pink tones, in other the pink seems to be over the whole of the underparts. **Upperparts** The Unst bird showed a pleasant pure powder-blue colour on the head, mantle, back, rump and upper tail coverts, without any brown tones. The other races of Subalpine Warbler are said to have brownish tones in the upperparts, although my initial thoughts were that some of the photos I found on the internet didn't always back this up. Something for further research no doubt. **Submoustachial stripe** The Unst bird showed a relatively short, indistinct white submoustachial stripe, which is said to be a feature of Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler (A. Corso pers. comm.). **Bare parts** Just an impression on my part so far, but the Unst bird and the photos

of Italian birds that I have seen all seem to have extremely bright orange-yellow legs. **Age** First-summer males of the other races of Subalpine Warbler can usually be aged by the presence of worn, retained juvenile wing feathers and, with good views or photos, it is usually straightforward to age birds in spring. I believe that the moult strategy for Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler proposed in Shirihai *et al.* 2001 (with a complete winter moult in its first year) has been called into question, but nevertheless, this was not a straightforward bird to age. It was not as spankingly fresh as some of the photos of Italian birds (presumably photographed earlier in spring). But the wing was slightly worn, especially on the tertials. Nevertheless, the rather restricted extent of the pink on the breast and the relatively dull iris colour of the Unst bird do suggest that the bird may be a first-summer (a view backed by A. Corso pers. comm.). I would suggest that the bird cannot be safely aged until we know more about the moult strategy.

Mike Pennington, Baltasound, Shetland
E-mail: penningtonunst@btinternet.com



Plate 242. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, June 2009 © Robert Brookes.

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Subalpine Warbler – its status in Scotland

This species breeds entirely within the Western Palearctic, and is typically divided into three or four subspecies. The historic treatment is that the nominate race (Sylvia cantillans cantillans), often termed 'Western Subalpine Warbler' breeds in Iberia, southern France and Italy, while inornata breeds in northern Morocco to Tunisia, albistriata ('Eastern Subalpine Warbler') breeds from easternmost Italy and south along the eastern Adriatic coast from Slovenia through Greece and the Greek Islands to westernmost Turkey and moltonii on western Mediterranean islands, including the Balearics, Corsica and Sardinia. The entire population is migratory with most wintering in the sub-Saharan Sahel belt, from Senegal to Sudan, with smaller numbers found in Algeria and Libya.

Only the males of each form are distinguishable in the field and some birds, presumably from the overlap zones of the subspecies ranges, show intermediate characters and cannot be readily assigned to race (For details on the identification and separation of the different forms see Shirihai et al., 2001). Many of the Subalpine Warblers found in Britain have not been identified to any particular sub-species, but it is thought that most of these records probably relate to the nominate form cantillans. However, it appears that a higher proportion of birds found in Scotland may relate to the eastern form than in the south of Britain.

The first Scottish and British record of Subalpine Warbler was a male on St Kilda, Outer Hebrides on 13–14 June 1894. It was shot and the specimen later assigned to the western race cantillans. The first individual in Britain attributed to the subspecies albistriata was an adult male on Fair Isle from 20–27 May 1951 (trapped on 24th).

Birds of the form cantillans were removed from the list of BBRC description species from the end of 2005, though birds attributed to other races are still assessed by BBRC. There have been 543 Subalpine Warblers (all forms) in Britain to the end of 2005 with 200 of these in

Scotland. Of the latter some 20 are considered to be of the form *albistriata*, with the most recent being a first-summer male on North Ronaldsay, Orkney from 30 April to 11 May 2007. BBRC are currently undertaking a review of records of this form, so totals may change.

The number of Subalpine Warblers recorded in Scotland increased from five in the 1950s to 10 in the 1960s, and 18 in the 1970s, 54 in the 1980s, 63 in the 1990s, and a further 46 birds from 2000 to the end of 2005. The highest annual totals in Britain (overall) during this period were 36 in 1995 (10 in Scotland) and 32 in 1988 (14 in Scotland).

The geographical distribution of records in Scotland is strongly biased to the Northern Isles, which account for over 80% of Scottish and 29% of British records. Of the other Scottish records, 12 are from the west, and the remaining 26 birds have all been on the east coast, with records from all recording areas from Caithness to Borders. The distribution of records elsewhere in Britain shows greatest numbers from the Isles of Scilly, with the remainder from coastal counties in England and Wales.

The majority of Subalpine Warblers found in Scotland have been in spring (90%), between the dates of 9 April and 26 June. Five others have been found in July, and the remainder in autumn, between the dates of 11 August and 22 October. This pattern is similar to that observed elsewhere in Britain, though autumn birds have been discovered as late as mid-November. In spring the Northern Isles provide most Subalpine Warbler records, while in autumn most come from the Isles of Scilly and eastern England. Most spring records are of males; this may simply reflect the fact that they are more conspicuous than the females, but could indicate that males are more likely to have overshot their breeding grounds, or travel further looking for unchallenged territories.

It has been suggested that the cluster of records of Subalpine Warbler in the Northern Isles (larger than any elsewhere in Britain) most likely includes a high proportion of birds of the eastern form *albistriata*, which arrive later in the spring, and the majority of Eastern Subalpine

Warblers identified in Britain have come from Fair Isle and Shetland. The arrival dates of birds on Fair Isle and Shetland are slightly later on average than those in southern England, (Pennington et al., 2004). This is also true of the overall pattern of arrival dates of this species in Scotland, which is identical to that of the Northern Isles rather than an intermediate pattern with that observed in southern England.

The autumn migration route of Eastern Subalpine Warbler typically sees birds fly directly over the Mediterranean to the African wintering grounds, while their spring migration route involves birds travelling further to the east up through Israel and the eastern Mediterranean than in autumn. This 'loop migration' is in an anti-clockwise direction and consequently birds which overshoot the breeding areas in southeast Europe may arrive on the east coast of Britain. The spring migration of Western Subalpine Warblers takes them directly north in the western part of the Mediterranean, so birds of this form which overshoot their breeding areas are more likely to make landfall in Britain on the south coasts of England and Wales.

The Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler at Skaw, Unst in June 2009 was the first to be well photographed AND sound-recorded, which should provide the necessary level of documentation for acceptance of this record as this subspecies. A male at Scatness, Shetland on 22–28 May 2009 also exhibited plumage features consistent with this form, and was heard to give the diagnostic 'trrrrt' call (but not recorded), while a male identified as this form was well watched, and heard to give the rattling call, at Burnham Overy Dunes, Norfolk from 30 September to 5 October 2007 (Golley, 2007). A Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler was also on Heligoland, Germany in October 2009.



Plate 243. Blackburnian Warbler, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, September 2009 © Will T.S. Miles.

Blackburnian Warbler, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 12–14 September 2009 – the second Scottish record

W.T.S. MILES

St Kilda had a distinctly autumnal feel to it on 12 September 2009, and when I left my bothy at 7 am, the slight chill and leafy smell in the air reminded me of the mainland in mid-October. I was on Hirta, the largest island in the group, as part of a research project studying Leach's Storm-petrels for Glasgow University and the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). That morning, after having completed my usual search for grounded petrels, which are attracted at night to the lights in the village, I decided to have a quick look for migrants around the wider area of Village Bay.

As I walked along the shorefront, there was a quiet and empty stillness to the island, disturbed only by the sound of the sea knocking pebbles together on the beach. Everything seemed relatively birdless, and along the dry-

stone walls and watercourses nothing much was moving. Slowly, I began to walk back towards the 'the street', the iconic and haunting row of blackhouses and cottages on St Kilda, deserted in 1930. On reaching the first empty house, and having seen very little, suddenly two birds materialised from a nearby boulder. The first, a Meadow Pipit, flew quickly away behind me, but the second was clearly a warbler, flew low overhead, and looked absolutely brilliant! Bright and vivid, it was ornately patterned in black and white, with intense orange-yellow on its throat and head. It called twice - 'chip-chip' - and disappeared down into the nearby ruins. At that point, based on the colours, calls, and limited experience of birding in Canada, I was certain the bird was an American wood warbler. 'This is *it*!', I thought, 'so just don't you go and bungle it!'

Slowly, like some kind of fixated and oversized cat (!), I began to creep towards the bird, moving gradually in the direction of where it had vanished. With feline silence, but certainly not grace, I sneaked up behind a wall and very softly 'chack-chacked' into the ancient stonework. To my utter astonishment, in an instant, up hopped the legendary stripes and fire of an exquisite Blackburnian Warbler! The immediate impression was of a tiny yellow flame, alert and blazing on the grey-green lichen; but within which could clearly be seen the dark upperparts, pale mantle braces, double white wing-bars, flickering black flank streaks, and the beautiful orange-yellow face pattern of the species. It was less than 2 m away, and in sheer disbelief I checked the features again, but there was no question about the identification. Elation! Even the median crown stripe and broken eye ring were clearly visible! The bird was simply stunning to behold; an extreme UK rarity, but one for which any thoughts about rareness were initially eclipsed by the absolutely beautiful patterns and colours on display: miniature, intricate and totally fiery.

The bird flitted far away into a decaying iris bed and cautiously I followed, camera at the ready. After having taken some record shots of it perched on a stem, I went and found Sarah Money and Ian McNee, who eventually both saw it well, but for just a few minutes each. The NTS Ranger on Hirta then contacted the site manager in Inverness, to discuss the bird and its location. Word came to me that the news was not to be released from St Kilda, and that NTS, the landowner, would consider whether or not to put the news out, once an impact assessment of a twitch had been made. The bird was highly mobile and elusive throughout its stay and only seen again on the 12th by the Ranger. On the 13th, I relocated it in the iris bed at about 9 am, and was able to take some digiscope images before it disappeared for the rest of the day. Sarah and I saw it finally on the 14th, for about two minutes, fly-catching along a dry-stone wall at about 1 pm; against the drab autumn colours of the island, it seemed to sparkle, and was a delight to watch.

Will T.S. Miles, Cambridge
E-mail: wilttsmiles@hotmail.com

Blackburnian Warbler - its status in Scotland

This species breeds in North America eastwards from easternmost central Alberta to southern Newfoundland and the Atlantic Coast, and south through the Great Lakes area eastwards to northern Virginia and south along the Appalachian Mountains to easternmost Tennessee and the western edge of the Carolinas. The population is entirely migratory and winters in southern Central America and in South America from Colombia, Venezuela and northern Brazil south along the Andes Mountains to central Bolivia. Its migration typically follows inland routes, which accounts for its extreme rarity as a vagrant to the Western Palearctic.

Prior to the St. Kilda bird there had been just one previous record of this eye-catching warbler in Scotland. This was an immature male found on Fair Isle on the morning of 7 October 1988. This individual frequented the cliffs of North Restensgeo, and then Furse, before flying off high over Bunes. During the assessment of this occurrence an earlier record was reviewed and accepted - a bird of indeterminate age and sex found on Skomer (Pembrokeshire) on 5 October 1961. There is only one other Western Palearctic record of this species to the end of 2009 - an individual seen on a ship off the north coast of Iceland in October 1987. The extreme rarity and stunning appearance of this species makes it one of the most sought after American warblers on the British List.



Plate 244. Blackburnian Warbler, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, September 2009 © Will T.S. Miles.

Birdline Scotland Review: 1 January to 30 June 2010

A. MURRAY

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All records refer to the period 1 January–30 June 2010 unless otherwise stated.

Records in Birdline Scotland Reviews are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

Records for inclusion in future Birdline Scotland Reviews should be phoned in on the Birdline Scotland Hotline 01292 611994.

The following abbreviations for the respective recording areas are used within the text: **Ang** - Angus & Dundee; **Arg** - Argyll; **Ayrs** - Ayrshire; **Bord** - Borders; **Caith** - Caithness; **D&G** - Dumfries & Galloway; **High** - Highland; **Loth** - Lothian; **M&N** - Moray & Nairn; **NES** - North-east Scotland; **Ork** - Orkney; **OH** - Outer Hebrides; **P&K** - Perth & Kinross; **Shet** - Shetland; **UF** - Upper Forth.

Bewick's Swan: an adult in the Ythan Estuary area (NES) on 21–27 March was the only one reported. **Taiga Bean Goose:** away from the Central Scotland flock at least 10 were noted on Shetland and Orkney in February and March.

Tundra Bean Goose: 13+ birds were on the Northern Isles in January–March, with at least three in North-east Scotland in March. In May, one was at Kergord (Shet) on 3rd. **Snow Goose:** during January–May, at least nine presumed vagrants were noted amongst the wild geese flocks, including three, two blue morph and a white morph Lessers, with Pink-footed Geese from 10 January, initially at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES), but also seen in Moray & Nairn and Highland; they were last reported near Inverness (High) on 21 April. The last reported bird was a white morph with the Pink-feet at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 8 May. **Canada Goose:** at least six presumed vagrant birds were with the wild geese on Islay and Tiree (both Arg) in January–April.

American Wigeon: a popular drake was in Dumfries & Galloway throughout January–March commuting between Castle Loch and WWT Caerlaverock; it was last noted at the latter site on 6 April. In May, a pair were at Loch Stiapavat, Lewis (OH) on 7th–17th. **Green-winged Teal:** up to ten different drakes were reported between 1 January and 12 May. In June, a drake was reported at St. Andrews (Fife) on 28th. **Blue-winged Teal:** in May, a drake was at Loch na Keal, Mull (Arg) on 1st, and then relocated the next day at Tarbert farm, Gigha. **Ring-necked Duck:** between 1 January and 9 May, four were reported: a female on North Ronaldsay (Ork) and three drakes, in Highland (2) and on Islay (Arg). A drake was in Fife at Rossie Bog/Angle Park/Birmie Loch from 17



Plate 245. Snow Goose, Blackgrange, Forth, March 2010 © John Nadin.

May onwards, with a drake on Loch Leven (P&K) on 21–23 June. **Lesser Scaup:** a drake was at Hogganfield Loch (Clyde) from 22 February to 24 March, whilst in June, two drakes were at Loch Leven (P&K) on 23rd, one still on 24th. **King Eider:** a second-winter drake was at Burghead (M&N) on 1 January–6 April, with two further drakes also noted there: an adult on 21 March and a first-winter on 17 February–29 March. Also in March, a first-winter male was at Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 27th–28th, whilst one drake was presumed to be responsible for a series of sightings at Cruden Bay, Ythan Estuary and Blackdog (all NES) on 11 April–26 June, a first-summer male was at Sandwick (Shet) on 8–16 May, a female was reported on Westray (Ork) on 21 May, a drake reported at Chanonry Point (High) on 7 June and a first-summer male at Burra Bridge (Shet) on 25 June. **Surf Scoter:** at least 12 were reported in the first half of the year.

White-billed Diver: one was reported off Peterburn (High) on 16 March, with then at least 18 seen between 6 April and 31 May, with reports from Shetland, Orkney, Outer Hebrides, North-east Scotland, Moray & Nairn, Outer Hebrides and Argyll. Most birds reported were adults. **Bittern:** in January and February, at least seven were seen in North-east Scotland, Orkney, Argyll, Angus, Upper Forth, Clyde and Borders. **Night Heron:** in June, an adult was at Liniolate, Benbecula (OH) on 22nd–23rd. **Great White Egret:** in the period, at least one was in Moray & Nairn and at least three birds noted in North-east Scotland. Singles appeared to have overwintered in both areas. Elsewhere one was at Balgavies/Rescobie Lochs (Ang) on 7–13 April.

Black Stork: a series of sightings in May and June from throughout Scotland, all possibly relate to the same colour-ringed adult: at



Plate 246. *Montagu's Harrier, Collieston, North-east Scotland, June 2010*
© Hywel Maggs. See also page 254.

Findhorn Valley on 8 May, then Loch Shin on 13 May (both High), then North Uist, Berneray, then South Uist (all OH) on 18–25 May, reported Muir of Ord (High) on 26 May, over Waternish Point, Skye (High) on 31 May, then Unst (Shet) on 2–6 June, then seen twice in flight in Lothian in the Haddington/Longniddry area on 22 June. The bird was ringed in northern Hungary close to the Slovakian border in June 2007. **White Stork:** two band-ringed free-flying individuals are probably responsible for all reports between 24 March and 31 May in Dumfries & Galloway, Lothian, Upper Forth, Angus, North-east Scotland, Perth & Kinross and Clyde. **Spoonbill:** up to four commuted between RSPB Loch of Strathbeg and the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 23 May–30 June, one was reported at Pow Burn (Ayr) on 25–27 May and two were reported at Lochdon, Mull (Arg) on 23 June.

Honey Buzzard: away from potential breeding areas migrants

in June included one south at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 5th, one on Fair Isle on 6th, one over Coal farm, St. Monans (Fife) on 22nd and one Brae (Shet) on 28th. **Black Kite:** in May, singles were seen on 19th at Voe (Shet) and RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES), one was with Red Kites in the Culter area on the outskirts of Aberdeen (NES) from 23rd, one was over Portree, Skye (High) on 30th and was seen near Dalmally (Arg) on 31st. **Montagu's Harrier:** a French wing-tagged ringtail was in the Collieston cross-roads area (NES) on at least the 12th and 22 June. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** in January, one was seen on three occasions on east Mainland Orkney between 7th and 30th. **Red-footed Falcon:** in May, a male was reported on the Rhinns, Islay (Arg) on 2nd and a female was seen briefly near Howgate (Loth) on 22nd, whilst in June, two were reported at The Oa, Islay (Arg) on 7th. **Hobby:** in May, singles were reported at Broomhill Bridge (High) on 17th and Fair

Isle on 29th, with seven reported in June on Fair Isle, Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Highland, Argyll, Lothian and Borders. **Gyr Falcon:** a superb juvenile white morph was in the Portnahaven area, Islay (Arg) on 15 January–9 February, but was then found dead in an emaciated condition on 14 February at Loch Indaal. Also in January, a grey morph was again near Stromness (Ork) on 6th, whilst in April, a white morph was in the Moorfoot Hills (Bord) on 10th and a white morph was at Eoropie, Lewis (OH) on 25th.

Corncrake: on Tiree (Arg), the first singing bird was heard at Balemartine on 11 April, with a final island total of 391 singing males in 2010. **Common Crane:** at least nine were seen in April, including four at RSPB Loch of Kinnordy (Ang) on 14th–19th, up to eight were noted in May and up to 13 were reported in June, including four over Scatness (Shet) on 7th.

Dotterel: one was on Tiree (Arg) on 19 March - possibly only the second ever March record for

Scotland. The next birds were then not seen in Scotland until 29 April, with then good numbers of migrants seen in May, the largest reported 'trip' being 29 at St. Combs (NES) on 14th. In June, away from breeding areas, one was at Papa Westray (Ork) on 13th and one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 17–18th. **Pacific Golden Plover:** one was reported at Breanish, Lewis (OH) on 2 June. **American Golden Plover:** one was at West Gerenish, South Uist (OH) on 11–12 May. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** one was at Scatness (Shet) on 20 June. **Baird's Sandpiper:** the overwintering juvenile was last seen at Whitesands Bay (Loth) on 11 January. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** five were reported in May from the 5th in North-east Scotland (2), Shetland (2) and Argyll, with in June, one was seen on Tiree (Arg) on 10th and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30th. **Broad-billed Sandpiper:** three were seen in May: at Broadford Bay, Skye (High) on 12th–16th, at Tynninghame Bay (Loth) on 13th–14th and on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 23rd–27th.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: one was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 17 May. **Great Snipe:** one was at Loch Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 23 May. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** in January, one was at Loch Gruinart, Islay (Arg) on 7th and one briefly at Rattray Head (NES) on 3rd, whilst in April one was seen briefly at WWT Caerlaverock (D&G) on 28th. **Spotted Sandpiper:** a summer-plumaged bird was at North Berwick (Loth) on 13 May. **Red-necked Phalarope:** reports away from known or potential breeding sites included single females seen near Kirriemuir (Ang) on 15 May and Auchlossan (NES) on 22 May. **Grey Phalarope:** one was seen off Peterhead (NES) on 16 January, with one the next day at Ruddons Point (Fife).

Pomarine Skua: only very low numbers were noted this spring - the largest reported count was only eight past the Aird an Runair headland, Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 15 May. **Long-tailed Skua:** as with the above species, only very low numbers were seen this May, with 17 past Eshaness (Shet) on 10th and 17 past Aird an Runair (OH) on 15th the best counts. An adult was present throughout June on East Burra (Shet). **Bonaparte's Gull:** an ad was at Thurso (Caith) on 9–11 March. **Ring-billed Gull:** only five seen in the January–April period on Shetland, Highland, Argyll, Clyde and Upper Forth, almost all of those presumed returning birds from previous winters. **Iceland Gull:** it was a poor winter for both this species and **Glaucous Gull**, the largest numbers of both were noted in January, when 25 Iceland and 18 Glaucous Gulls were reported. The adult Iceland Gull that wintered again at Ayr (Ayr) in 2009/10 was back for its 19th winter - it was first seen as a first-winter in winter 1991/92. **Sabine's Gull:** one was reported from the Papa Stour ferry (Shet)



Plate 247. Spotted Sandpiper, North Berwick, Lothian, May 2010 © Ian Andrews.



Plates 248–249. *Caspian Tern*, *Endrick Mouth, Clyde*, June 2010 © Darren O'Brien.

on 2 June. **Gull-billed Tern:** one was at Moss, Tiree (Arg) on 26 April. **Caspian Tern:** an adult was at the Endrick Mouth (Clyde) on 19 June, with then presumably the same bird at Meikle Loch, then RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (both NES) on 21st.

Brünnich's Guillemot: a summer-plumaged adult was seen briefly off Lyness, Hoy (Ork) on 28 June. **Little Auk:** only very low numbers reported with in January, the best counts being 16 past Sumburgh Head (Shet) on 14th and 24 past Kincaig Point (Fife) on 23rd. **Snowy Owl:** a male was reported intermittently throughout the period up to 9 June at least on the Outer Hebrides, being seen on west Lewis, North Uist and St. Kilda. Elsewhere in May, one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 1st–2nd. **Alpine Swift:** in a record breaking influx into Britain this spring the only ones reported in Scotland were two over Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 24 March. **Bee-eater:** in

April, two were at Calgary, Mull (Arg) on 24th–28th, with one nearby on Iona on 30th. **Hoopoe:** one was at Carinish, North Uist (OH) on 27 March, with then in April, one at Dunglass (Loth/Bord) on 4th–7th was amongst at least six seen during the month, with then in May, at least seven seen between 1st and 22nd on Fair Isle, Shetland (3), Orkney, Highland and Argyll. **Wryneck:** in

April, one was on Whalsay (Shet) on 27th and one inland at Bilston Woods (Loth) on 28th, with then in May, only four reported on 5th–20th on Shetland (3) and the Outer Hebrides.

Short-toed Lark: one was on Cairn Gorm (High) on 22 May, with in June, one seen on Papa Stour (Shet) on 2nd. **Shore Lark:** two were at Torness Power Station



Plate 250. *Shore Lark*, *Skateraw, Lothian*, March 2010 © John Nadin.

(Loth) on 17 March–7 April and one was on Fair Isle on 23 June. **Red-rumped Swallow:** one was seen briefly on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 11 May, one was on Unst (Shet) on 18–19 May and one was on South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25 May–2 June. **Tawny Pipit:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23–26 June - first record for the island and potentially the fourth for Orkney, if accepted. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was on Fair Isle on 24 May. **Water Pipit:** during January–March, up to eight were reported in Lothian (3), Clyde (2), Ayrshire (2) and Dumfries & Galloway. **Waxwing:** only around 17 were reported in January, with then 150 reported in February, 140 still in March–April, including 54 in Aberdeen (NES) on 14 March, with then in May, late singles at Dunvegan, Skye (High) on 12th–19th and Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 25th. **Black-bellied Dipper:** one was near Scalloway (Shet) on 24 January–6 February, with presumably the same near Lerwick on 13 March. In April, one was on Bressay (Shet) on 2nd. **Bluethroat:** a female at Torness Power Station (Loth) on 4–5 April was presumably a White-spotted Bluethroat, whilst 10 Red-spotted Bluethroats were seen between 13 May and 15 June, all on the Northern Isles, apart from a female at Collieston (NES) on 10 June.

Paddyfield Warbler: one showed well at Grutness (Shet) on 21 June. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one was trapped on Fair Isle on 10 June. **Marsh Warbler:** nine were noted from 29 May onwards, all on Fair Isle and Shetland, apart from a singing bird reported at Kinlochberrie (High) on 13 June. **Great Reed Warbler:** one was at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 6 June. **Icterine Warbler:** only six were seen between 27 May and 15 June, all on the Northern Isles. **Subalpine Warbler:** two were seen on Shetland in May: a male at Trondra on 2nd–4th and one

on Foula on 26th–27th. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** singing males were at Inchnadamph (High) on 20 May and at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 4 June - both first records for their respective areas if accepted and third-fourth records for Scotland. **Firecrest:** one was at Gosford Estate (Loth) on 17 January–23 February and one was reported at Minnigaff (D&G) on 18 February. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** a first-summer male was at Vidlin (Shet) on 20 May. **Collared Flycatcher:** a first-summer male was at Garynahine, Lewis (OH) on 1 June - second record for Outer Hebrides.

Golden Oriole: seven were seen on the Northern Isles between 19 May and 6 June. **Red-backed Shrike:** 16 were reported from 20 May onwards, mostly on the Northern Isles. **Great Grey Shrike:** one was reported at Insh Marshes RSPB (High) on 1 February, one was near Rhynie (NES) on 18–29 March and one was on Fair Isle on

6 May. **Rose-coloured Starling:** in June, an adult was at Totronald, Coll (Arg) on 14th and an adult at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 17th. **Common Rosefinch:** 16 were reported from 22 May, mostly on the Northern Isles though including two popular singing red males nearby to each other at Tormaukin Inn, Glendevon (P&K) on 16–26 June and Pool O' Muckhart (UF) on 20–24 June. **White-throated Sparrow:** one was on Fair Isle on 19–20 May, with a different bird nearby at Spiggie (Shet) on 21 May. **Rustic Bunting:** singles were on Fair Isle on 20th and 21 May, one was on Fetlar (Shet) on 28 May, a male was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 31 May–1 June and the third of the spring on Fair Isle, a male, was present on 15 June. **Little Bunting:** the wintering bird remained in the garden at Dunnet (Caith) throughout until 8 April - the longest staying bird ever in Scotland. In the spring one was on Fair Isle on 9 May.



Plate 251. Common Rosefinch, Glendevon, Perth & Kinross, June 2010 © John Nadin.

Advice to contributors

There is a basic division in *Scottish Birds* between papers and short notes that are peer-reviewed and articles, news and Club items that are not. This split in content is differentiated by fonts used and paper colour.

The first part accepts manuscripts on the status, distribution and populations of birds in Scotland and, particularly, changes in these over time. Write-ups of census work find a natural home in this section, as do the culmination of research topics and updates to information in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Original work and observations are encouraged, but summary papers will be considered and key-note papers of a more general nature may occasionally be commissioned. Papers should be fully referenced as in any scientific work, and our house style should be followed. Articles of less than 700 words are generally considered as Short Notes, but are otherwise in the same format.

Authors should bear in mind that only a small proportion of the *Scottish Birds* readership are scientists and should aim to present their material concisely, interestingly and clearly. Unfamiliar technical terms and symbols should be avoided wherever possible and, if deemed essential, should be explained. Supporting statistics should be kept to a minimum. All papers and short notes are accepted on the understanding that they have not been offered for publication elsewhere and that they will be subject to editing. Papers will be acknowledged on receipt and are normally reviewed by at least two members of the editorial panel and, in most cases also by an independent referee. They will normally be published in order of acceptance of fully revised manuscripts.

Scottish Birds publishes obituaries of Club members and others who have contributed to Scottish ornithology. These are organised through Waterston House, where the Office Manager will liaise with contributors. Book reviews are organised through the Club Librarian.

The second part of *Scottish Birds* welcomes informal as well as more serious contributions about any aspect of birds and their habitats in Scotland. It is not peer-reviewed, has minimal editing and contributions can be descriptive, anecdotal, controversial, humorous or quirky. They can report on surveys, express opinions, describe birds and places, look back into history, speculate as to the future and can represent organisations or be the work of private individuals. The documentation of rare and scarce birds in Scotland, plus a wide range of identification, site and species related information is lavishly illustrated by high quality colour photographs. We welcome photographs, maps, cartoons, and will accept basic graphs and tables when relevant. Meeting reports or field trip accounts are all welcome, but our main aim is to focus on Scottish birds in Scotland or abroad. We will occasionally include articles from other parts of the world and sometimes about other wildlife. In terms of length, we accept anything from short notes up to articles of c. 2,000 words. There are no strict guidelines as to format, but we would encourage contributors to follow our house style shown in the excerpts from a recent issue available on the SOC publications web page.

Please submit articles! We very much wish to encourage unsolicited contributions to this part of *Scottish Birds*. The editors spend much time requesting articles - a task that would be far less onerous if they are submitted freely from members and other readers. We wish to make it as easy as possible for contributors to send us material that reflects the enormous range of news, work and opinion relevant to Scotland's birds.

Text, image and graphics formats

Contributions should preferably be submitted in electronic format either on disk or by email to mail@the-soc.org.uk, stating the type of word processing package used if not Microsoft Word or a generic 'rich text format'. Only short articles and letters can be accepted in printed or hand written form. No fees are paid.

Tables, maps and diagrams should be designed to fit either a single column or the full page width. Table and photograph captions should be self explanatory and should be able to stand alone from the text. Please include all captions after the text. For photographs please supply the locality and month/year taken, together with the name of the photographer.

Maps and other graphics should preferably be provided in eps (Encapsulated PostScript) format, or as a high resolution jpg/tiff file, good quality computer print-out or drawn in black ink. Other formats can be accepted; please liaise with the Office Manager. Photographs should be supplied as high resolution jpg/tiff files with minimal or no cropping or enhancement.

Reference should be made to *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) for guidance on style of presentation, use of capitals, form of references, etc. Detailed instructions for contributors with respect to house style conventions can be found on the SOC website's publication page.

Please send all correspondence to the SOC Office Manager at Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY or e-mail mail@the-soc.org.uk. Telephone 01875 871330 or e-mail for further advice and assistance.

PhotoSPOT

Plate 252. Despite being 3 June 2010, there was still something like 40% snow cover on the Cairngorm-Macdui plateau. Dotterel at lower altitudes were already incubating, but this day two pairs in one of the larger snow-free expanses had yet to lay.

It was a rare relatively windless day and I could hear the Dotterel some distance away, long before I saw them. They were about 50 m apart and the first pair I reached was busy feeding. When I crouched still the female would walk

within inches of me, often too close for the telephoto lens. Suddenly, I was distracted by loud calling from the other pair and so made my way in their direction in the hope of some behavioural shots. Both birds ignored me. The female crouched close to the ground, calling intensified, and the male moved slowly towards her. I stepped back in anticipation of fitting both birds in the frame and focussed on the eye of the motionless female in time to take this image with a Canon 40D and a Canon 400mm f5.6 lens attached to a monopod.

Dave Pullan (www.davepullan.co.uk)



Featuring the best images posted on the SOC website each quarter, PhotoSpot will present stunning portraits as well as record shots of something unique, accompanied by the story behind the photograph and the equipment used. Send in your photos now - it's open to all.